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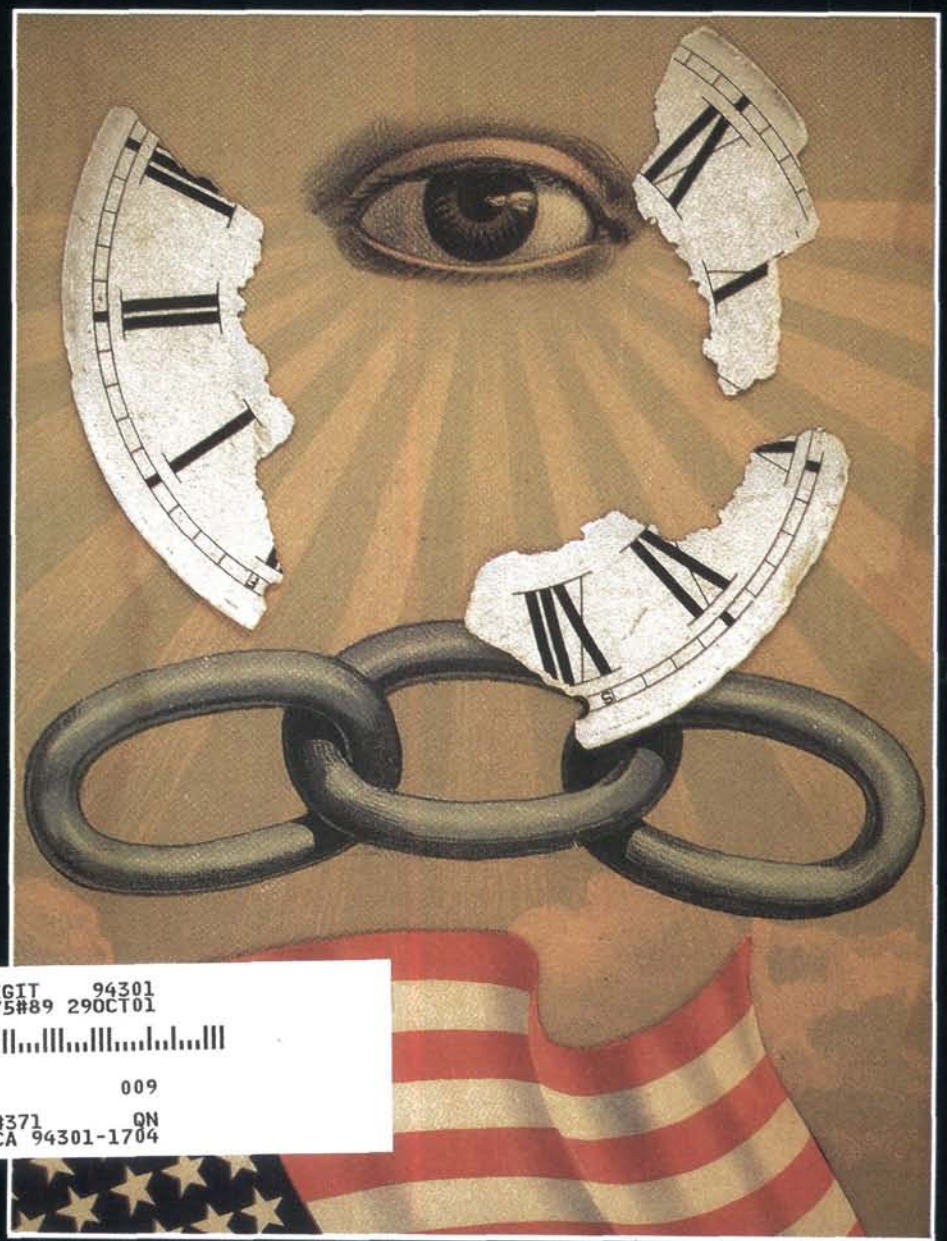

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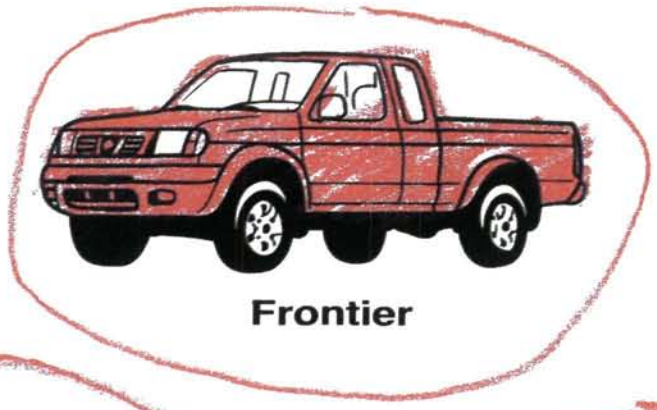

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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MAY 25, 1998

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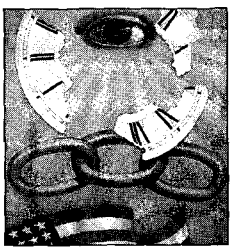

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CORRESPONDENCE

Panning pork

To the editors:

In "Roll Out the Barrel" (April 20), Jonathan Cohn argues that congressional pork "is like putting oil in your car engine: it lubricates the parts and keeps friction to a minimum." Perhaps. But doesn't too much grease eventually choke the engine?

Take for example the recently passed House transportation authorization bill. Tucked neatly into its 505 pages are 1,506 so-called "highway demonstration projects" carrying a price tag of $9.3 billion. As far as Citizens Against Government Waste is concerned, these projects are nothing more than thinly veiled pork-barrel spending. But Cohn contends that $9.3 billion is the price Americans have to pay to keep their highways from crumbling into dust. He neglects to mention that the Senate passed a similar authorization bill with no demonstration projects whatsoever.

Cohn goes on to defend pork as "an awful lot of fuss over what is ... a very small amount of money," remarking that the $13.2 billion in pork identified in CAGW's 1998 "Pig Book" is less than one percent of the entire federal budget. He falls into the same trap as all proponents of government spending—using the very size of the federal budget as justification for wasting even more money.

In a further attempt to trivialize pork, Cohn quotes one woefully misinformed Senate staffer as saying that CAGW's research consists primarily of "projects that sound funny." In reality, most of the pork projects CAGW uncovers are not amusing at all but rather are nondescript items meant to attract as little attention as possible. However, it is the absurd—such as the $330,000 outhouse and the designation of Lake Champlain as a "Great Lake"—that makes members of Congress squirm and the public scream.

Pork-barrel spending is not a victimless crime. More critical than the sheer monetary loss is its debasement of the political process. The lure of pork not only tempts lawmakers to bribe voters with their own money but also entices the electorate to demand special favors at the expense of their fellow citizens. It is not, as Cohn insists, a practice to be celebrated but rather a subtle attempt to usurp the will of the people.

THOMAS A. SCHATZ
President
Citizens Against Government Waste
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

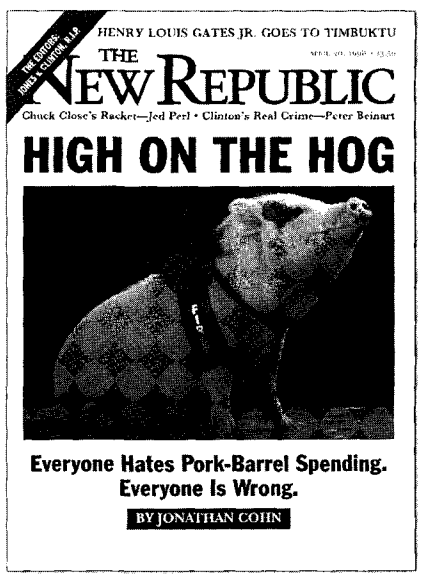
If Jonathan Cohn is correct that such rampant corruption is the only way to get members of Congress to vote in the national interest, no further argument in favor of term limits is necessary. We need a different crop of congressmen. Senators and, most particularly, representatives cannot be permitted to hang around Washington long enough that they forget what life is like outside the Beltway and begin to believe that blackmail and extortion are acceptable.

STEPHEN D. LEONARD
Atlanta, Georgia

Close friend

To the editors:

Jed Perl would have you believe that Chuck Close paints the way he does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Chuck Close's Racket—Jed Perl • Clinton's Real Crime—Peter Beinart
HIGH ON THE HOG
Everyone Hates Pork-Barrel Spending.
Everyone Is Wrong.
BY JONATHAN COHN

because that is what sells paintings ("Death and Realism," April 20). The way Perl tells it, Close has adopted a "fashionably paradoxical position" just to "establish a blue-chip New York reputation."

Perl only leaves me wondering why Close has picked such a labor-intensive style—"on the order of making a model of Manhattan out of matchsticks." Surely there are less labor-intensive ways to sell out.

CONLEY ROLLINS
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Moynihan replies

To the editors:

In his article, "Very Pat" (April 20), concerning the Social Security proposal I presented at the Kennedy School on March 16, Jonathan Chait writes that adjusting the Consumer Price Index in order to obtain something like a cost-of-living index "is a way of cutting Social Security without having to admit it."

The problem here is that the CPI is *not* a cost-of-living index. Who says? The Bureau of Labor Statistics in a pamphlet, "Understanding the Consumer Price Index: Answers to Some Questions." Question 3 is as follows: "Is the CPI a cost-of-living index? No, although it frequently (and mistakenly) is called a cost-of-living index...."

The passage goes on to explain the various difficulties. The most readily grasped is the "substitution effect." The pamphlet states: "Another difference between the CPI and a cost-of-living index is that the CPI does not reflect the changes in buying or consumption patterns that consumers probably would make to adjust to relative price changes. For example, if the price of pork increases compared to those of other meats, shoppers might shift their purchases away from pork to beef, poultry, or fish. The ability to substitute means that the increase in the cost to consumers of maintaining their level of well-being tends to be somewhat less than the increase in the cost of the mix of goods and services they previously purchased. The current CPI does not reflect this substitution among items as a cost-of-living index would."

We are a long way from developing a proper cost-of-living index. In the foreseeable future the most feasible and reasonable measure is an adjustment, such as I have proposed, that takes into account the limitations of the CPI as a cost-of-living index. Keep in mind that indexed benefits would continue to go up, just not quite as much.

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN
United States Senator
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Truly gutsy Social Security reform would go beyond Moynihan's tepid proposal and make this most regressive program moderately progressive. By removing the cap on taxable income and establishing variable tax rates—say, three, six, and nine percent at different levels of income—the program would give a significant break to low-wage workers, a slight reduction to the middle class, and a manageable increase to the affluent. This should be a no-brainer for progressives.

DAVID STOESZ
Richmond, Virginia

Constitutional question

To the editors:

Richard A. Posner writes in his review of Bruce Ackerman's *We the People, Volume 2: Transformations* ("This Magic Moment,"

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April 6) that, under Article V of the Constitution, a proposed amendment requires a two-thirds vote of each house of Congress, in one case for ratification by the states and in the other case for summoning a constitutional convention. However, the language of Article V is quite clear: One method of proposal is by a two-thirds vote of each house of Congress; the other is by "the Application of the Legislatures of two thirds of the several States." In the latter case, the application is to Congress; in other words, a two-thirds vote is not needed because Congress is *required* to call the Convention.

KENT M. BRUDNEY
Via the Internet

Richard A. Posner replies:

The wording of Article V is in fact ambiguous, and its meaning has not been resolved by judicial decision. The relevant language is: "The Congress, whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this constitution, or, on the Application of the Legislatures of two thirds of the several States, shall call a Convention for proposing Amendments...." The critical question is whether the clause "whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary" qualifies only the method of proposing amendments or also the method of calling a convention. Although the issue has not been resolved judicially, maybe there is a definitive scholarly literature on the matter of which the writer of the letter may be aware and I am not. However, I think he is wrong to regard the wording of Article V itself as clear.

Lying and the law

To the editors:

I would like to point out to Jonathan Rauch that he is mistaken in his belief that "lying about adultery is being treated as a legal offense rather than a civilized norm" in the Lewinsky affair ("High Lying," April 20). Lying under oath, regardless of what is being lied about, is a legal offense. There is nothing uncivilized about regarding as perjury a lie that happens to be about adultery.

NICOLE MARCHESE
Southport, Connecticut

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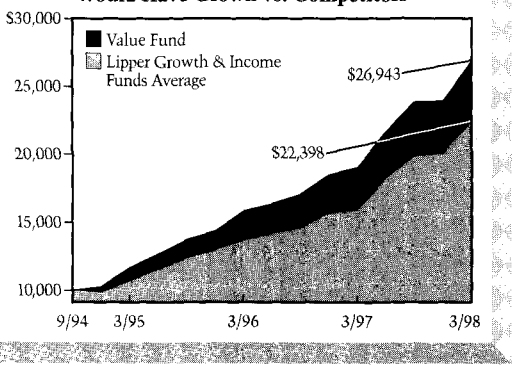

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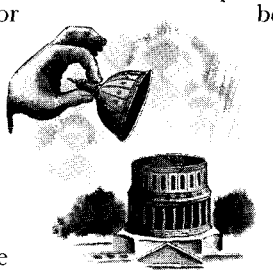
FROM WASHINGTON

To tell the truth

Approximately half of the questions asked by the White House press corps at President Clinton's April 30 news conference were about the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Does the president feel responsible for all the friends and staffers who have been saddled with huge legal bills? Does he support the Secret Service's claims of a right to refuse to testify about goings-on at the White House? But, in one way or another, all of the queries were variations on a single theme: Mr. President, why can't you just tell us the truth? And, to all of them, the president's answer was, essentially, the same: Go fly a kite. The president even declared himself "absolutely" willing to live with the questions about Bimbroglio through the end of his second term.

Quite a performance. But I doubt that the public at large was terribly interested. Surveys since the beginning of the Lewinsky scandal have consistently shown that a huge majority—70 percent or more—of the American people believe that the media are paying too much attention to the story. If we gain nothing else from the whole affair, we should at least come away with a renewed appreciation for the perceptual gap separating the American people from the Washington press corps.



My point is not that the public is more in tune ideologically with Clinton than the media are. If anything, the opposite is the case; I know a lot of Washington journalists, and my guess is that more than 90 percent of them voted for Clinton in both 1992 and 1996. Nor do I mean to echo the complaints voiced by *U.S. News & World Report* editor James Fallows in his book *Breaking the News*. An adversarial relationship between press and government is both inevitable and healthy in a democracy. What I have in mind is the cultural difference between professional Washington journalists and the viewers and readers they ostensibly serve. The public apparently does not share some of the norms that journalists cherish most fervently and that are, in fact, most necessary for the press to play its proper role in a democracy.

For the press, truth is, or should be, an absolute value. Journalists spend most of their time trying to get straight facts from people who generally would prefer not to give them. They hate being lied to. They hate it because it is wrong. They hate it because it thwarts the purposes of a free press. And they hate it because it makes them look bad to publish something that later turns out not to be right. The credo of journalism is disclosure: the more factual information at the public's disposal, the better. This is the hierarchy of values that makes journalists feel like public servants, even as they pursue the advancement of their own careers.

When Washington reporters evince outrage about Bimbroglio, what they are voicing, in part, is professional journalism's ingrained absolutism about the truth. Not only is the president not leveling about what allegedly happened, but also *what allegedly happened itself* is that the president lied. To a reporter, this is unpardonable. When one of the most fastidious and astute press critics of Clinton's lying, Stuart Taylor Jr. of the *National Journal*, recently entertained an offer from Kenneth Starr to join the prosecution team, he was merely taking the absolutist values of his profession to a logical (if ironic) extreme. Taylor's journalist's conscience was so shocked by the president's dishonesty that he felt obligated to abandon journalism itself to do something about it.

For non-journalists, though, truth is a relative value. It is prized, of course, but other values can take precedence: social stability, say, or national security. "White lies" are allowed in business and family life all the time. It might even be fair to say that the capacity to assimilate a certain amount of decorous untruth is part of what it takes to negotiate the passages of adult life.

Meanwhile, to some degree, the public accepts the routine lies of politicians as the equivalent of overhead in the business of democracy. The public will embrace the press's values, and accept a relentless search for the truth, if and only if the lies are perceived as part of a threat to democracy or effective govern-

continued on page 41

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MAY 25, 1998

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Last month, at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, the audience of journalists and Hollywood celebrities howled when President Clinton suggested that NBC replace "Seinfeld" with a live broadcast of Congress. "Now there's a show about nothing," the president said. Not since President Harry Truman campaigned against the "do-nothing" Republican Congress of his day has a legislature taken such a beating for its alleged inertia. And there's more than a little truth to the charges. This year's legislative calendar includes only 89 days of actual time for work—the lowest number since 1956. The House and Senate took the longest nonelection vacation in 30 years last December and January. Members took another two weeks off in April, at which point the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee began to send out legislative scorecards with zeros on it. Stung by the criticism, Congress is now beginning to whip itself into an election-year frenzy of activity. "If we don't do something soon," says a GOP aide, "we're going to forfeit the House." So the Republican leadership is even threatening to do a bill per day. Get ready for a bloated transportation bill and a hasty stab at IRS reform.

What no one seems willing to consider is that inaction may not necessarily be a catastrophe. Yes, a quiet legislative environment goes against the grain of the Washington press corps, which thrives on revolutions and recriminations. And it nettles the local political and bureaucratic elite, which earns its money implementing new federal programs. But, for all the huffing and puffing, does the country really need a raft of new legislation? While Congress sleeps, the U.S. economy continues to blossom at an annual rate of 4.2 percent. In just seven years, the economy has created more than 14 million new jobs. Inflation remains at its lowest annual rate since 1964, even as unemployment falls to 4.6 percent. At the same time, the federal deficit has evaporated. Washington has facilitated this mainly by resisting the temptation to make bold economic strokes: Both Congress and the White House have stuck to a budget agreement that is now over four years old; the Federal Reserve has exercised cautious stewardship over interest rates.

Thanks largely to the general prosperity, social problems, too, are abating—even those which once seemed completely intractable. The national pathology of violent crime has plunged even faster than the unemployment rate: In New York City alone, the murder rate has dropped 63 percent since 1990. And last week brought new statistics from the federal government showing progress in another seemingly insoluble crisis: The percentage of teenage girls having babies declined for the sixth year in a row; as part of that trend, the birthrate among African American teenagers reached its lowest level ever reported. Even infant mortality rates are at unprecedented lows.

We are not arguing for complacency, much less against federal government involvement in solving the nation's problems. Rather, we are making the case for keeping the role of federal legislation in its proper perspective. Take the hopeful signs on teen pregnancy. To some degree, the improvements reflect the impact of federal welfare reform. But since the teen pregnancy rate has been falling since 1991—well before welfare reform—other factors almost certainly explain most of the decline. Those other factors include state-level reforms in welfare, increased availability of contraception through both government and private agencies, and even church- or corporate-supported abstinence education programs.

The federal role may have been an ironic one. The fierce but inconclusive debate in Washington produced no "silver bullet" legislation to solve the problem. And it's unlikely it ever could have, given the sensitive cultural nature of the problem. But the debate itself may have served to focus the public's attention and to spur other actors—state, local, religious, and private—to take effective action on their own. Indeed, if the federal government had taken over and imposed a one-size-fits-all solution on the country, many good ideas that have worked in particular local environments might not have been tried.

The public looks to Washington for leadership, but it has also often felt the unintended consequences of Washington's rashness. Americans want decisive government, but for now they seem content to elect a

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Republican Congress and a Democratic president who can keep each other in check. These paradoxes may help explain why the do-nothing Congress's public approval ratings have climbed to nearly 60 percent—the highest level in more than a decade. The voters seem to recall that, the last time this Congress tried to do something really big, it shut down the whole government. •

NOTEBOOK

DEATH PUNDITRY: Unabomber Ted Kaczynski has been sentenced to four consecutive life terms without possibility of parole, pursuant to a bargain with federal prosecutors under which he pled guilty to murder in exchange for escaping the death penalty. Few terrorists have attacked so wantonly on behalf of such a nutty ideology and with so little remorse. In a brief but chilling courtroom speech, Kaczynski offered no apology for his admitted murders and maimings but claimed instead that he was a victim of a government effort to "discredit" his radical anti-technology ideology. To conservative death-penalty advocates, of course, Kaczynski's punishment doesn't remotely fit his coolly calculated crimes. The failure to execute Kaczynski, George Will opines, shows that our too-tolerant society has an "inability . . . to act with moral certainty—to be appropriately judgmental—toward this cold-blooded killer." Will quotes with approval a *Commentary* article by David Gelernter, a surviving Unabomber victim, to the effect that America's failure to execute more killers bespeaks "an approach to murder so casual as to be depraved." What we need, Will and Gelernter agree, is swift, certain, and inescapable capital punishment. But is that really what the Unabomber case proves? It is worth remembering how Ted Kaczynski came to be arrested in the first place. His own brother, David Kaczynski, fingered him to federal authorities, after realizing that the style of the Unabomber's published writings matched that of Ted's old letters. David Kaczynski was not "casual" about murder; indeed, he was determined to prevent murder. His moral agony consisted, rather, of the conflict between his wish to keep innocent people from being killed by his brother and his wish to keep his guilty but beloved brother from being killed by the state. David finally decided to inform on his own flesh and blood only because government officials told him there was a chance Ted might not pay for his crimes with his life. In other words, if David lived in a society where the death penalty for murder was non-negotiable, Ted Kaczynski might still be building bombs in his Montana cabin. And David Kaczynski's dilemma is not that uncommon; many murderers are arrested and convicted based on information from family members. All Americans should be grateful for David Kaczynski's moral courage. We should also be grateful that our legal system was flexible enough to make it possible for him to act on it.

WORDPLAY: As the Middle East peace talks move into a tenser and more delicate phase, American journalists struggle for the right formulations to characterize the bargaining over territory and security between Israel and the Palestinians. The United States is insisting that Israel return 13 percent of the West Bank, a quantity of land, *The New York Times* reports, that is "the minimum" the U.S. believes Yasir Arafat "can accept." What's interesting here is the word "can." Presumably, this means Arafat cannot accept less because to do so would expose him to the risk of an uprising from the ultra-radicals in his midst. But whatever happened to taking risks for peace? And, given that Arafat is subject to this veto from the Palestinian ultras, how does the *Times* justify its assessment (based, to be sure, on conversations with U.S. officials) that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's insistence on handing over less territory is "the main stumbling block"?

HIGHER LOYALTY: This March, Nelson Mandela treated the visiting Bill Clinton to a public lecture on loyalty. Defending his country's cozy relations with Cuba and Libya, the South African president declared: "Moral authority dictates that we should not abandon those who helped in this fight of ours.... I am not going to betray the trust of those who helped." Tell it to Taiwan. Last month, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki traveled to Beijing to celebrate South Africa's decision to establish diplomatic relations with China—and, accordingly, to sever official ties with Taiwan. It's true that Taiwan's support for the ANC does not go back as far as Libya's and Cuba's. But, since 1994, when Taiwanese donors reportedly ploughed $10 million into Mandela's election campaign, it has done a lot more to help South Africa's fledgling government than either of those bankrupt socialist paradises. And, if Taiwan didn't do much for the ANC before it came to power, neither did China—which scorned the multiracial Congress in favor of black separatists. Asked whether he was bothered by Beijing's human rights record, Mandela replied that it was not right to meddle in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country—which is just what South Africa's white governments used to tell Libya and Cuba when they aided the ANC.

SURPLUS EXCESSES: Only yesterday, it seemed that the federal deficit would expand indefinitely into the future. Now, it's the projected federal budget surplus that keeps growing and growing. The surplus for the current fiscal year was estimated at $8 billion as recently as March; the latest official projection is $50 billion. The lesson for politicians would seem to be: Budgetary conditions are subject to change without notice, so don't make too many promises based on what you think the federal fiscal balance is going to be even a few years hence. But Republicans in Congress have their own notions of prudence. How else to explain the

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

No Bargain

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

Voucher supporters often claim that private schools are the best bargain around. The figures they cite usually suggest that private schools spend only about half the money per pupil that public schools do. Such comparisons make a big impression on taxpayers. Even some people who have always supported public schools wonder whether a voucher system might not be a good deal—and perhaps on a statewide or national basis.

But people in Cleveland, the home of an experimental voucher program, were brought up short this year. In March, the Cleveland program, which serves 3,000 low-income students, was found to be wildly over budget. There was a 41 percent cost overrun, and the state had to bail out the operation with an extra $2.9 million drawn from money earmarked for the public schools. And next year's projected budget of $8.7 million may have to be adjusted upward another 55 percent.

Officials had plenty of warning, too. An independent audit had already flagged a number of questionable practices and expenses, among them an extraordinary bill for transportation, which resulted from children in the voucher program taking taxis to school. That alone ran up costs an extra $1.5 million.

While these problems may be the result of particular bugs in a particular program, they suggest that running even a small voucher program can't be done on the cheap. If you don't spend money to create good procedures, and then monitor them, which public boards of education are required to do—you're likely to spend it on things like taxi rides, the way they're doing in Cleveland.

How much would a voucher program that established sound procedures and financial and academic accountability cost? Professor Henry Levin of Stanford University has done an analysis showing that adequate procedures and mechanisms to support a *national* voucher system (together with the politically inevitable costs of paying for children already in private school) would come to approximately $73 billion per year—on top of the costs of the vouchers themselves.

Comparing Apples to Oranges

But even without Cleveland-style problems, the idea that private schools are half the price of public schools is a lot of hokum.

Private school tuition pays for a basic program for a single child. And the tuition quoted is usually for elementary schools, which are considerably less expensive than middle or high schools. Per-pupil expenditure, which is the way public school costs are usually presented, is an average of all the services the school system offers to students at every level.

Evidence shows voucher schools don't cost less—or work better.

For example, the special education program, which is federally mandated and very expensive, is, properly, included in quotes of per-pupil expenditures. Private schools are not required to accept special education students, so nearly all of them—some 12 percent of the student population—are educated in the public schools. In addition to special education, the per-pupil expenditure for public schools includes other mandated—and important—services, like transportation, English as a second language, and breakfast and lunch programs. These are costly, and even if a private school offers them, they are not included in the tuition fee usually cited in comparisons with public school per-pupil expenditures.

When private schools offer the same combination of services as public schools, they cost as much, if not more. That's what Professor Levin found when he looked at the Milwaukee voucher program, and a similar analysis confirms that it's also true in Cleveland—even without the cost overruns.

Disappointing Results

Further, despite what voucher advocates say, there is no solid proof that private schools do a better job academically. People in Cleveland were understandably dissatisfied with their long-neglected public schools. However, the official evaluation of the Cleveland voucher program indicates that its students are not doing any better than comparable public school children. The evidence about the Milwaukee voucher program, which serves a similar group of children, also fails to support the claim that kids in voucher schools are moving ahead of public school children.

Despite what voucher advocates say, vouchers will not give children a better education—or a cheaper one. But we know things that do work. The Cleveland program spent $10 million this year on vouchers for 3,000 children. The same money could have brought two proven reform strategies into all of Cleveland's elementary schools: Success for All, a reading program, would have cost $4 million; and the $6 million left could have been spent to reduce class size in the same schools. Now I'd call that a real bargain—for the kids as well as the taxpayers. ■

Where We Stand is published once every month in *The New Republic*. To comment, write to Sandra Feldman, AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20001. **© Sandra Feldman 1998.** **Visit our web site (http://www.aft.org).**

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recent endorsement by Speaker Newt Gingrich of a proposal by John Kasich, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, to divide the surpluses up into individual savings accounts for every wage-earner in the country? Under the plan, every American currently enrolled in Social Security—that is, just about everyone—would be permitted to invest his personal share of the surpluses in some government-approved security, including stocks. Though intended to pave the way politically for a privatized Social Security system, Kasich's plan is separate from the ideas he and some Democrats have floated, under which workers would invest a portion of their Social Security payroll taxes in private equities. "The bigger the surplus we end up with, the more can be put into an Individual Retirement Account," Kasich has said. What Kasich has not said, however, is what would happen if the surplus ends up *smaller* than expected in a particular year—or if there's no surplus at all. But you can bet he doesn't mean that Americans would have money deducted from these new IRA's to help the government defray any deficits that might occur in the coming years. Actually, since this new plan does not fix Social Security, it's not clear why any voter should prefer it to the previous Republican prescription for the surpluses: a tax cut. At least that would have let everyone choose how to invest or spend his share of the federal windfall. All Gingrich and Kasich are doing now is writing a check they may or may not be able to cash.

AND NOW A WORD FROM OUR SENATORS: We weren't surprised—or, for that matter, particularly bothered—to learn that the tobacco industry is spending $50 million in advertising and lobbying against proposed cigarette legislation. Even socially noxious corporations have a right to free speech. But we were a bit taken aback by the reaction from anti-tobacco lawmakers. This week, four Democratic Senators—Jack Reed of Rhode Island, Kent Conrad of North Dakota, Dick Durbin of Illinois, and Paul Wellstone of Minnesota—urged broadcasters to run anti-smoking public service ads with the same frequency, and in the same time slots, as industry ads protesting the proposed bill. The public service ads themselves are laudable. They urge people not to smoke because it's unhealthy, and, depending on which study you believe, they actually have some effect. But that's precisely why the Democrats' scheme is such a bad idea. Any attempts to use these ads as a counterweight to political advertising can only diminish the credibility of their nonpartisan public health message. Fighting teen smoking is important. Preserving the integrity of the public service advertising program is important, too.

THE WRATH OF ROTH: Senate Finance Committee Chairman William Roth's bill to overhaul the IRS gets curiouser and curiouser. Since the bill would cost the government money—by weakening the IRS's capacity to collect taxes—Congress needs to find some way to "pay for" the expected revenue loss. Last week, Roth announced his solution. He proposes to expand the number of people who are eligible to pull their money out of a "traditional" IRA and put it into a Roth IRA. In the short run, this will increase the government's tax receipts because you must pay taxes when you withdraw money from a traditional IRA to put it into a Roth IRA. The only reason anybody would convert to a Roth IRA, though, is to be in a position to pay less tax on his investment income later. So, allowing more of these conversions will cost the government money over the long run. Is this a way to "pay for" government or to bankrupt it?

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: And while we're on the subject of the Roth IRA . . . a couple of our hawk-eyed readers have been good enough to point out that Charles Lane's recent TRB column on the Roth IRA ("Wrong Roth," May 18) failed to explain the provisions of the program completely. It is available only to single taxpayers who make $110,000 a year or less and to couples filing jointly who make $160,000 a year or less. Therefore, it would have been more accurate for Lane to describe the Roth IRA as a boon to the upper middle class rather than as "a boon to the rich."

DEPARTMENT OF CONGRATULATIONS: We are pleased to announce that writer Florence Williams has just received the 1998 "Outstanding Personal Experience Article or Essay" award from the American Society of Journalists and Authors. Williams was cited for her New York Diarist, "Benched," in the November 10, 1997, issue of TNR. •

THE HARD QUESTIONS

SPOILED SPORTS

By Michael J. Sandel

When capitalism and community collide, as they increasingly do these days, community needs all the help it can get. Consider the case of sports. Like few institutions in American life, professional baseball, football, basketball, and hockey provide a source of social glue and civic pride. From Yankee Stadium to Candlestick Park, sports stadiums are the cathedrals of our civil religion, public spaces that gather people from different walks of life in rituals of loss and hope, profanity and prayer. The com-

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mon sentiments reach beyond the ballpark or arena. When the Boston Celtics and the Los Angeles Lakers faced off in the NBA playoffs some years ago, one could walk the streets of Boston and from every open window hear the echoes of the game.

But professional sports is not only a source of civic identity. It is also a business. And these days the money in sports is driving out the community.

Of course, when fans go to the ballpark, they don't go for the sake of a civic experience. They go to see Ken Griffey Jr. hit the ball a long way or make a sparkling catch in center field. But what they experience at the game are two important features of democratic public life: One is a broad equality of condition; another is a sense of belonging to a particular place. While box seats have always cost more than the bleachers, the ballpark is one of the few public places where CEOs sit side by side with mailroom clerks, where all eat the same soggy hot dogs, where rich and poor alike get wet when it rains, where all hearts sink and soar with the fate of the home team.

Or so it was until recently. Today, the allure of greater profit is leading team owners to transform their games in ways that destroy the class-mixing habits and sense of place on which sports and democracy thrive. The proliferation of luxury skyboxes segregates the upper crust from the common folk in the stands below. At the same time, owners are constantly relocating teams, or threatening to do so, if the home town is unwilling or unable to shell out huge public subsidies for stadiums.

The skybox trend began when the Dallas Cowboys installed luxury suites at Texas Stadium, where corporations pay up to $1.5 million dollars for the right to entertain executives and clients in posh settings above the crowd. Through the 1980s, more than a dozen teams followed the Cowboys' lead, cosseting privileged fans behind Plexiglas perches in the sky. In the late 1980s, Congress cut back on the tax deduction corporations could claim for skybox expenses, but this did not stem the demand for the climate-controlled retreats. Although skybox revenues represent a windfall for the teams, they change the fans' relation to the game and to one another. The sweaty, egalitarian intensity of the Boston Garden in Larry Bird's day has given way to Boston's commodious but class-stratified FleetCenter, where executive-suite patrons dine on pistachio-encrusted salmon in a restaurant so elevated that they cannot see the court below.

If skyboxes separate fans by class, relocation deprives a community of its home team, as the notorious case of the Cleveland Browns illustrates. Arthur Modell, for 35 years the owner of the Browns, could not complain about the Cleveland fans, who filled the 70,000 seats in Municipal Stadium game after game. But, in 1995, he announced he was moving his team to Baltimore, where local officials were offering him $65 million, a new stadium free of rent, and revenues from luxury boxes.

Cleveland is not the only community whose hometeam loyalty went unrequited by a profit-maximizing owner. In fact, Baltimore's extravagant bid for the Browns was prompted by a desire to replace its own beloved Baltimore Colts, who bolted for Indianapolis in 1984. ("This is my team," the Colt's owner bluntly declared at the time. "I own it, and I'll do whatever I want with it.") In the last six years, eight major-league teams have abandoned their host cities for sweeter deals elsewhere, and another 20 cities paid the blackmail teams demanded in the form of new or renovated stadiums. Many other teams are currently demanding subsidies as a condition of staying put. The Super Bowl champion Denver Broncos, for example, are threatening to leave unless taxpayers fork over $266 million for a new stadium.

From the standpoint of market principles, there is nothing wrong with selling teams to the highest bidder. Cities and states often compete with one another to attract new businesses to their communities. If it is all right to offer tax breaks and subsidies to persuade an auto plant to relocate, why not bid for a sports franchise as well? The answer is that all bidding wars among states are objectionable because they allow corporations to extract revenue that should go to education and other pressing public needs. In the case of sports, the bidding is doubly damaging because it mocks the loyalty and civic pride that communities invest in their teams.

What, if anything, can be done to render communities less vulnerable to extortion by the teams they love? David Morris, cofounder of a Minneapolis-based group called the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, suggests a promising solution: Since teams are now demanding subsidies that exceed the value of the teams, why not allow communities to take ownership themselves? The sole example of community ownership in big-league sports is the Green Bay Packers, incorporated in 1923 as a nonprofit organization. Despite their small market, the Packers have won three Super Bowls and sold out their games for more than 30 consecutive seasons. The waiting list for season tickets is 36,000 names long. Their 108,000 shareholder-fans know that they will not make a profit. But they do not need to worry that their Packers will leave town.

As Morris points out, the NFL now prohibits community ownership (with an exception for the Packers), and Major League Baseball has an informal policy against it. He therefore endorses legislation proposed by Representative Earl Blumenauer of Oregon that would require leagues to permit public ownership of teams. Leagues that refused would lose the valuable antitrust exemption that allows teams to collaborate in selling broadcast rights. The bill, dubbed the Give Fans a Chance Act, would also require teams to give 180 days notice before moving and afford local groups the opportunity to make ownership bids or other proposals to retain the team.

Whether or not Congress acts, the movement for community ownership may hold growing appeal for voters

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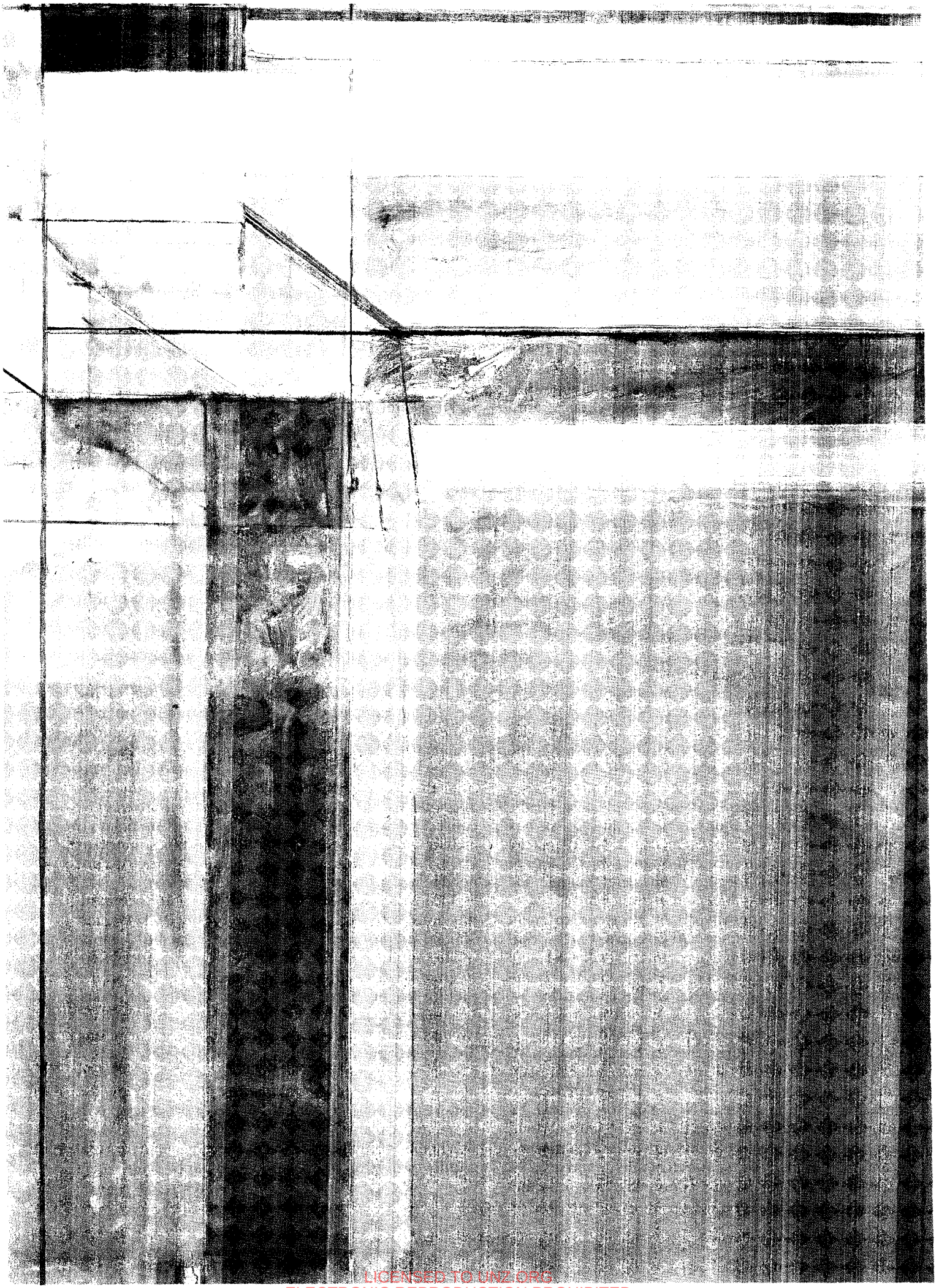

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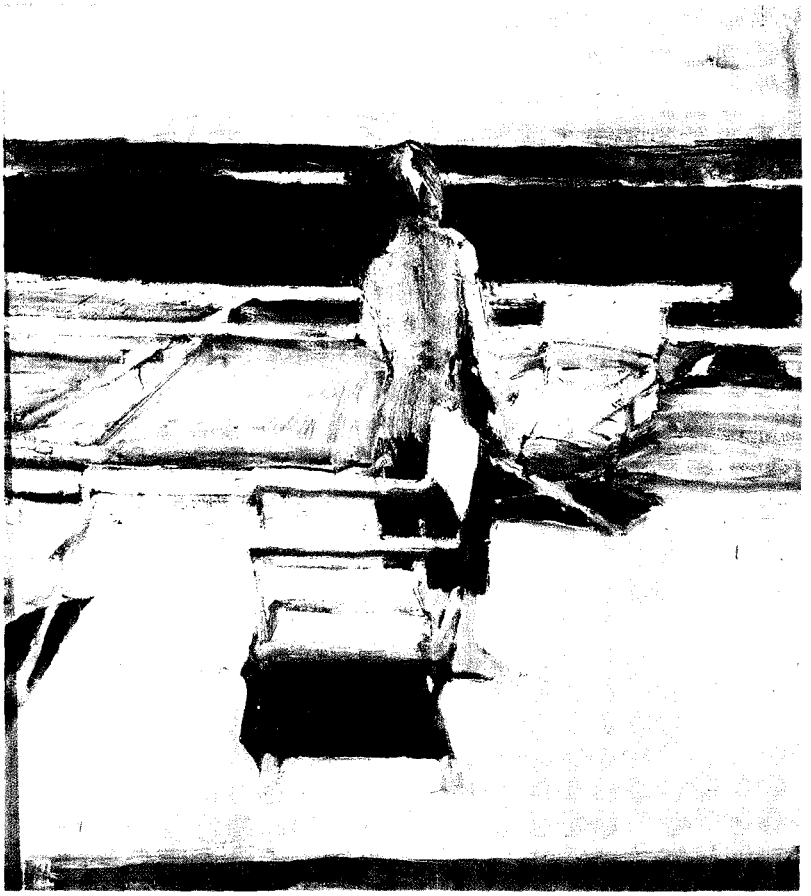

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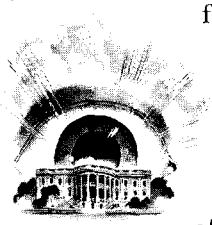
reluctant to subsidize millionaire owners and players as the price of keeping the home team at home. Activists in Denver plan a statewide initiative that would tie any stadium subsidy to a public share in the Broncos. In Minnesota, the danger of losing the Twins baseball franchise to Charlotte, North Carolina, has led some Minnesota legislators to propose a bill that would enable the state to buy the team and sell it to the fans. The drive for community ownership has won support both from conservatives who oppose stadium subsidies and from progressives who prize community and want government to level the playing field between private wealth and the public good. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

SNOG JOB

By Dana Milbank

This is the story of how NERO romanced the SNOG. Actually, it's about how NATO enlargement sailed through the Senate last week, but you wouldn't have kept reading if you knew that up front. After all, the ratification of the enlargement treaty, though historic in this post-cold-war era, is less intriguing than the Capitol Hill courtship that smoothed the way. SNOG is the delightful acronym for the Senate NATO Observer Group, an ad hoc team of 28 senators formed by Trent Lott last year to analyze the NATO treaty. (SNOG, it turns out, is also British slang for a lewd act, but more about that later.) NERO is the name of the White House and State Department's ad hoc group, the NATO Enlargement Ratification Office. NERO's mission: Get SNOG to ratify.



The Senate's 80 to 19 vote to bring Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic under NATO's umbrella was a rare foreign policy breakthrough for the White House, which has constantly bickered with Congress on international affairs and made even the victories look ugly. At the moment, the fights are about financing for the International Monetary Fund (both Democratic and Republican leaders in the House threaten to oppose it) and payment of United Nations dues (Republicans have added anti-abortion provisions). But Clinton's foreign policy headaches on the Hill began long ago with a near-death experience on NAFTA and continued, more recently, with a bruising fight over the Chemical Weapons Convention and a retreat on fast track so embarrassing that the president doesn't even plan to try again this year. "The Clinton administration had been at such war with Congress they didn't know how to consult," says one senior GOP foreign-relations staffer.

That makes the smooth sailing for NATO expansion, itself a dubious proposition just two years ago, all the more noteworthy. If the SNOG fell for NERO, might the same model work for Clinton's other lifeless initiatives?

NERO worked, in part, because it wasn't tied to the usual bureaucracy in the State Department or the National Security Council. Because NERO's staff had no other responsibility, it wasn't derailed by the latest crisis in Kosovo, Iraq, or the president's private study. Over 15 months, the group combed the heartland, signing up seemingly indifferent groups like the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the AFL-CIO, and the American Legion—then sending word of the endorsements in weekly blast-faxes to each Capitol Hill office. They made stops in both Dakotas in mid-winter, speaking at high schools, arguing on talk shows. Jeremy Rosner, NERO's top fiddle, went on Oliver North's radio show and on public-access cable TV the night of the Academy Awards. He traveled all the way to Portland State University, only to find five Oregonians there to hear him.

NERO's sell gave the senators cover for their ratification vote by creating the *appearance* of a groundswell of support for NATO expansion when, in reality, the general public didn't care much one way or the other. (Most Americans, you'll recall, couldn't name any of the three countries involved.) For example, Rosner asked the ambassador to NATO and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to meet with the editorial board of *The Chicago Tribune*, which opposed expansion. When he heard editorial writers were visiting Eastern Europe, Rosner had embassies there roll out the red carpet. Sure enough, on March 13, the *Tribune* opined that it is not "a small thing for a newspaper to change its mind on an issue as momentous as NATO expansion [but] that is what we do today." The day the editorial came out, Rosner handed a copy to each participant at a briefing for Democratic senatorial staffers to refute fears their bosses raised about antagonizing Russia.

The endorsements proved useful again on the Hill in March. Confronted by complaints that there hadn't been enough public debate, Senator William Roth, the SNOG chief and an enlargement supporter, rose with a list of endorsements from state legislatures and the National Governors' Association. When the Foreign Relations Committee held open hearings, 80 percent of those who spoke were pro-enlargement. This was no accident: "A lot of these groups had been in constant contact with Jeremy," says Mike Haltzel, Senator Joseph Biden's foreign policy man.

Rosner also coordinated the conversion of Jimmy Carter, an enlargement skeptic. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sent him a note requesting a meeting; Carter met her in Washington around the beginning of this year, and she had Clinton talk with him as well. The result: Before the vote, Rosner delivered to the senators an endorsement from Carter.

Of course, NATO enlargement may well have cleared

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the Senate without NERO's sales job. Arms-makers liked it, Eastern European ethnic groups liked it, and Lott liked it. The unorganized opposition took the form of disparate voices such as those of George Kennan and Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. (Both "X" and the Chunky Monkey maker worried about antagonizing Russia.) Rosner himself says that "ninety-five percent of this was getting the policy right." It's also worth remembering that other Clinton administration efforts to set up similar structures have made a mockery of adhockery (health care reform comes to mind). NERO, however, found a way around the failures of past efforts, and its efforts clearly widened the margin of support.

Rosner, who reported directly to Clinton and Albright, had something of a rocky start. The State Department's European desk wasn't pleased to have its authority usurped. The Senate was also hostile at first. After Clinton and Yeltsin signed the NATO Founding Act in May 1996, Senate Republicans complained angrily that the administration was too slow to produce information. Republicans blamed Strobe Talbott, the deputy secretary of state, but Rosner also got clobbered at a meeting with GOP aides.

But NERO soon learned how to woo the senators. A couple of weeks later, on June 11, Rosner arranged for Clinton to meet with SNOG in the White House residence for two hours. At the unreported session, Clinton told the senators, seated in couches and armchairs, that he planned to call for admitting only Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. It was potentially a tense meeting—that day, a dozen senators had given the president a letter pushing for the addition of Slovenia—but the ancient Strom Thurmond piped up in support. NERO also took the SNOG to the NATO meeting in Madrid a few weeks later. The administration arranged for Roth to address the NATO assembly, a first for a legislator. It was there the Americans, alerted to the other, British meaning of SNOG—a messy form of kissing—removed the SNOG sign from the meeting-room door before the U.K. delegation got the wrong idea.

Not even crusty Jesse Helms could resist NERO's advances. The senator initially expressed serious doubts about enlargement—last July he wrote an op-ed piece grumbling that it gave Russia too much say over NATO. But Rosner worked on Helms and his staff almost daily, asking what it would take to satisfy them. Finally, Helms aides actually gave an advance copy of the question Helms would ask Albright at his October 7 hearing. Rosner and others at the State Department tested various answers on the Helms folks in advance until they got it just right. The hearing went according to script, and Albright, in her staged response, said Russia "will never have a veto over NATO policy." One month later, a placated Helms distributed a "dear colleague" letter saying, "enlargement is squarely in the American national interest."

NERO used its 15 months before the vote to flatter the senatorial egos standing in the way, entertaining them regularly with a parade of luminaries like Vaclav Havel. Rosner sent the senators biweekly classified bulletins from the Pentagon and State Department—a surprise to GOP legislators still bitter about being shut out by the administration on the Chemical Weapons Convention. And, when senators left town, NERO followed them home and beyond. In Alaska, Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, used Rosner's talking points to hit up Senator Ted Stevens. And when Senator Max Cleland, uncommitted on NATO expansion, took a trip to Europe in April, Rosner got the U.S. ambassador to NATO to work on the senator in Brussels. Not surprisingly, both Stevens and Cleland wound up in the aye column last week. •

ON THE HILL

PEOPLE OF GENDER

By Hanna Rosin

In a recent interview with the Beltway paper *The Hill*, Republican congresswoman Jennifer Dunn confessed to something designed to make your skin crawl. "Early in her first term," the tale began, Dunn "and her chief of staff, Phil Bond, were in an elevator. She was on her way to meet with a ranking member of a committee. Dunn was looking down at her notes, she recalls, and someone got into the elevator. Then, without warning, he kissed her on the lips." The clincher is, this sneaky-piggy lothario turned out to be none other than the man she was going to meet, the ranking member of the committee, a man far senior to Dunn in rank and no doubt far bigger.

Just so you know, none of the House office buildings has more than nine floors, so even a ride from sub-basement to top, uninterrupted (unlikely), would only take about 20 seconds. And, with Phil Bond as chaperon, the encounter must have been more awkward than threatening. But let's forget the details for a moment. As *The Hill* article went on to explain, Dunn meant for her story to illustrate women's special insight into men's boorish behavior and, more to the point, "why a woman should help evaluate the charges against President Clinton, some of which stemmed from accounts of sexual harassment."

The moral to Dunn's story is not just theoretical. In nervous anticipation of the arrival of Ken Starr's toxic report, House Republicans have been wracking their brains to come up with the proper way to handle it. The natural option is to turn the report over to the Judiciary Committee, but that particular committee has a nagging

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p.r. problem: It happens to be stocked with old white male Republicans, desiccated conservatives all (including Bob Barr, the self-styled Clinton obsessive). The excess testosterone presents an agonizing quandary to Republicans; a replay of the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, with white men brow-beating Anita Hill, is the last thing Newt Gingrich wants, especially given his new presidential aspirations.

The alternative was to create a special panel to preview the report, an idea House Republicans raised, dropped a few weeks later, and have now revived in altered form. What they've settled on so far is an elite panel stocked with a handful of wise men and perhaps one or two wise women. As it happens, Dunn is on the short list for the coveted token spot.

The pressure to include a woman on the panel is building fast. Here and there, conservative women are suddenly reconnecting with their feminine intuition. Jo Ann Emerson, a Missouri Republican, morphed into a sudden convert to difference feminism when she told *The Hill* that women have a unique perspective that any panel must reckon with: "It's like Deborah Tannen's book, *You Just Don't Understand*." Added Tillie Fowler, a Republican from Florida who served on the speaker's task force on sexual harassment in the military: "It's another perspective. I think it would be good to have one or two women on the panel."

Last minute conversions are always suspicious, and this one is no different. It's not the notion that Dunn might have some special insight into harassment, having experienced some form of it herself. It's just the irksome habit conservative women have of suddenly remembering these feminine ordeals at just the expedient moment. This sudden soul-searching is merely the latest example of a dubious phenomenon among the growing ranks of Republican women—a tendency to play the feminist when politically convenient. One minute the conservative women are hard as nails, tough as any man, scornful of special treatment. The next minute they dissolve into a puddle of vulnerability, tuning into their right brain and spewing out Deborah Tannen.

Sometimes the phenomenon takes a different form, and conservative women band together like a nose-ringed crew of militant campus feminists. Two years ago, Dunn and company joined forces against one of their male Democratic colleagues who had referred to Virginia Thomas, wife of Clarence and a top aide to Dick Armey, as "Mrs. Clarence Thomas." "Your actions today were sexist and thoughtless," they wrote, and urged their colleague to "swiftly" make amends to "all working women." Call them the Cindy Sherman Republicans, after the photographer who gussies herself up in a dazzling array of varied identities. You want a weepy feminine type? A radical feminist? I got one right here in my closet.

These women are not, after all, the moderates from the 1992 Year of the Woman, Republicans like Susan Molinari and Connie Morella, who joined with Democrats in the Women's Caucus to pass bills like the Family Leave Act and the Violence Against Women Act. Most of these new Republicans wouldn't be caught dead in what's left of the Women's Caucus. Jennifer Dunn is a standard efficiency type, concerned with yuppie issues like estate taxes and welfare reform and the computer industry in Washington state. Jo Ann Emerson couldn't be less of a difference feminist. When she took over her husband's seat in 1996, Emerson's platform was the usual Midwestern jumble of local pork and family values: a federally funded bridge over the Missouri River, four-lane highways, soybean research, and the rights of the unborn. In their usual mode, these women are fond of saying there's no such thing as women's issues.

In their rush to pounce on Clinton and stick up for his victims, the women have casually ditched some of their hallowed principles, particularly on the subject of gender relations. In late March, a group of about a dozen Republican women met to plan a coordinated attack against feminist hypocrites. "We'd like to see our Democratic sisters speak out on the floor," said Sue Kelly, a Republican from New York.

During the following month's blitzkrieg on the airwaves, the women virtually transmuted into the enemy. Conservatives have always attacked feminists for eroding the distinction between consensual and nonconsensual sex. Suddenly, they were doing the same, carping endlessly about the "power" differential between Clinton and the women. "When you're talking about power, when you're talking about people's careers ... and also their supervisor, I think it goes beyond that," said Anne Northrup of Kentucky, a leader of the group. "It's not a private issue. It's a workplace issue." This idea that, if a man is higher ranked than a woman, the sex is by definition nonconsensual is not just feminism but feminism of the most radical kind, à la Andrea Dworkin.

To be fair to the GOP women, it's not so much they as their male Republican counterparts who are pushing to include a woman on the special panel. Most people think creating a special panel, in any form, is a terrible idea. In the charged atmosphere of the Clinton scandal, any deviation from normal protocol—that is, sending the report straight to the existing Judiciary Committee—is likely to be seized on by the Clinton camp as a sign of a partisan witch-hunt. But, with visions of the world watching nightly installments of crusty white Republican men dissecting Monica clouding their minds, the Republicans just can't seem to let the panel idea drop. If Dunn makes it on the panel, it will be less because she's lobbying than because her male colleagues want to make sure she gets there. "When someone like Jennifer Dunn can speak of her own experience of being kissed on an elevator, that's something men can't do," says a source on the Judiciary Committee. "And that makes a huge difference."

It's possible that Gingrich and the Republican men are just being gender-sensitive and responding to some self-generated quota. More likely, their drive to include women is mostly cynical. In a typical off-the-record quote on the subject, one Republican source told *Roll Call* that two women would be perfect fits for the panel, because

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they give a "kinder, gentler, and less partisan" look to the all-male Republican side of the Judiciary Committee.

The women are not actually kinder and gentler; they only appear that way. In fact, they are just the opposite; by kinder and gentler, the source means kinder and gentler to Clinton's victims and tougher on Clinton. So the sudden Republican sensitivity is merely a way to sneak in Clinton attackers whom Democrats will find it harder to criticize. One knowing, sympathetic glance from Jennifer Dunn to Kathleen Willey, and Clinton's in trouble. Of course, when that happens, the Democrats can always turn to Ann Lewis. •

Merger mania hits the teachers' unions.

DIVIDED THEY STAND

By Peter Schrag

The late Al Shanker, who was the president of the American Federation of Teachers from 1974 until his death last year, probably was the nearest thing to a statesman that white-collar unionism ever had. In part, the success of that statesmanship rested on the hope of creating a single union of teachers and allied professionals—meaning a merger between his AFT, which now has 950,000 members, most of them in the nation's big urban districts, and the much larger National Education Association, which has its 2.3 million.

At a time when public education was increasingly being challenged by voucher proposals and by private providers of everything from tutoring to complete school programs, Shanker sought to reshape the profession into a major force for higher academic standards and other reforms. And there was no way to do that as long as local affiliates of the two unions were competing for members by promising nothing but fatter contracts and more inflexible job guarantees—and then waging unending war on school systems in the effort to get them.

Now that the leaders of the two organizations have publicly declared their intention to merge, the dream of a single union is about to meet its supreme test. If the merger is approved by the delegates at their respective union conventions this July, the new, still-unnamed merged entity (for now it's being called the United Organization) could have a major impact both on the nation's schools and on the broader fortunes of the American labor movement.

The new organization would, among other things, be the largest single union within the AFL-CIO, larger than the often corrupt and embarrassing Teamsters. As an organization of white-collar professionals, most of them middle-class women, it could do much to polish the faded image of organized labor. And, although the two teacher organizations rarely disagree on national education issues even now, the new entity would bring a single voice to bear on these debates. Most particularly, if the hopes of its proponents are realized, the new union would assume a major role in turning around underperforming schools, upgrading the skills of the profession, and leading all of education to higher standards.

But the new entity could also easily lose as much in brains and energy as it gains in bulk. It could become an even bigger and less accountable obstacle to reform than many state and local affiliates often already are. It could, as its many conservative critics claim, act like just another monopoly.

Of course, for the moment, the biggest question is whether the merger will happen at all. There are good and ample reasons for the merger, not least of them the growing agreement between the presidents of both organizations—Bob Chase at the NEA, Sandra Feldman at the AFT—that public education is in trouble. Without what Chase calls "the new unionism"—a movement broadly concerned with improving schools and not just bread-and-butter issues—the whole enterprise of public education could eventually be torn apart by a restive public that often sees the schools as arrogant, unresponsive bureaucracies.

But teacher unionism has always been an uncomfortable fit, producing no end of ambivalence among the rank and file, particularly among members of the older and sometimes sclerotic NEA. Are teachers just another collection of blue-collar working stiffs, like steel workers or auto workers or coal miners? Or are they professionals whose responsibilities transcend the limitations of negotiated hours, working conditions, and seniority rules? That is, are they not properly subject to collective bargaining, rigid salary structures, grievance procedures, and so on?

And, if they insist on the prerogatives and status of professionals, can they also behave like assembly-line

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unionists—hitting the bricks and trying to shut down the enterprise, even as they claim to have only the children's interests at heart? It was only last year that the NEA accepted the principle of peer review, meaning the participation of teachers in evaluating, mentoring, and, if necessary, disciplining other teachers. Until then, the union had always regarded peer review as a threat to rank-and-file solidarity. "We're a hybrid," said one NEA official in the Midwest. "Our members want to be a union when they want to be a union. They want to be professionals when they want to be professionals."

That sort of ambivalence—combined with the misgivings that tens of thousands of NEA members, particularly those in the South and Midwest, have about belonging to anything even remotely connected with the AFL-CIO—leaves the fate of the merger in considerable doubt. Most NEA officials acknowledge that, as one of them said, "if the vote were taken today, we couldn't get the [two-thirds majority] we need" to have it approved at the union's convention in July. In a straw poll taken at the Illinois Education Association convention in March, 75 percent of the 1,000 delegates voted against the merger. There appears to be equally strong opposition in Iowa, New Jersey, and several other states.

Both organizations are divided. Shanker, who died last year, was probably more influential outside his union than inside it. A proponent of world-class standards, national testing, and upgraded teaching skills, he was a man who could—and did—make common cause with education reformers across a broad political spectrum and who, in the last years of his career, probably had more stature than any of them. At the same time, many of the members of his locals in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and other large cities—school people who had first learned their militant unionism from him—remained stuck in the confrontational model of schoolhouse labor relations.

For its part, the NEA is even more deeply split—among people mired in what remains of its traditionally friendly, rural schoolmarm ethos of school management, those who ambivalently want to be both union members and professionals, and those who are with Chase in the search for that new unionism. Worse, the inertia generated by the ambivalence in the NEA is exacerbated by other imponderables, particularly the fact that the NEA, in the words of one friendly critic, "has gone absolutely wacko with political correctness." The organization has rigid ethnic quotas throughout its governance and management structure. Rules require a minimum of 20 percent minority representation on each committee, as well as on the board of directors and the executive committee, and an effort to achieve ethnic proportionality in all staff positions—all of which produces an endemic unwillingness to take on tough issues.

For example, at one recent joint meeting, AFT members raised tough questions about failing inner-city schools. As one participant described the reaction, "the NEA staffers came away shaking their heads that such issues should be raised at all. They don't even like talking about those things because they're afraid someone will be offended." In the last national AFT conventions over which he presided, Shanker also often warned his cheering members about going overboard in the attempt to include all handicapped children—even those who are dangerous and disruptive—in mainstream classrooms. The NEA has ducked the issue. Meanwhile, in order not to offend its activists, the NEA takes positions on scores of issues that bear only the vaguest relationship to the central mission of the schools—from endorsement of the "accurate portrayal" of the roles and contributions of gays and lesbians "throughout history," to statehood for the District of Columbia, to the need for a single-payer health care system. The NEA even supported a boycott of Florida orange juice after Anita Bryant, at the time a chief spokesperson for the industry, made some remarks that were deemed homophobic.

The proposed governance structure for the new entity does not impose numerical quotas, although it promises that the union will remain committed "to maintain—and expand—current AFT and NEA levels of minority representation throughout leadership, governing [sic] and staff." There is also a promise for "the expansion of all governing bodies [to] help ensure adequate minority representation."

AFT officers who helped negotiate the outlines of the merger say privately that the new governance structure more closely resembles the AFT's somewhat more streamlined and centralized arrangement than the NEA's many-layered hyperdemocratic system. But that hardly guarantees smooth sailing. The existing NEA staff, which, at least until recently, had been far more influential in the organization than its elected officers, has an enormous investment in the status quo. So do the thousands of college professors, especially in the nation's hidebound education schools, who are influential NEA members. Will they embrace an organization that would be committed to major restructuring and changes of attitudes in teacher training programs?

A lot remains to be worked out. If both unions approve the merger this summer, the new entity probably won't come into existence until 2002, and, even after that, state and local affiliates, while they would be members of the United Organization, would not be required to merge. Nor, in recognition of the anti-union sentiment within the NEA, would individual members be required to join the AFL-CIO. Consequently, an organization with a potential AFL-CIO membership of 3.2 million is only guaranteeing the federation 1.4 million members—a figure calculated to be just large enough to exceed the Teamsters and thus, it is hoped, to overshadow it in public visibility. The difference—equal to roughly 82 percent of the NEA's current membership—is itself a measure of the uncertainties of the new unionism. And, as education consultant Julia Koppich says, "a lot of rank-and-file NEA members just

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don't believe public education is in much danger."

Against all that, Chase, who really seems to be serious about changing his organization and sees the merger as the best—perhaps the only—way to do it, is running from state to state to persuade the rank and file that there's a different world out there. The task is made easier by Feldman, who is less intimidating and generally regarded as more personable than Shanker was.

But the cultures of the two organizations remain vastly different. Chase was clearly influenced by Shanker, who long ago became bored with the bread-and-butter teacher unionism he himself developed in the late 1960s and 1970s. But Chase's version still has a softer edge to it than Shanker's or Feldman's: a little less hard-nosed reform substance about teacher training and low-performing schools, a bit more feel-good process talk about collaborative nonadversarial work with school boards "to resolve problems" and to "give members more say in how schools are run." This merger, he said, is "like blending two households." It's hardly an image anybody in the AFT would ever use.

It's also something that faintly echoes the pre-union, small-town sensibility of the old NEA, whose affiliates exercised a lot of clout in state legislatures, but whose notion of collective action was to "meet and confer" with management, not anything resembling collective bargaining, much less going out on strike. That echo is hardly the wave of the future. It's clear that Chase, like much of the NEA, remains uncomfortable with the AFT's brasher, more aggressive reform rhetoric. More broadly, his organization, which learned many of its union tactics from Shanker and learned at least to talk the new unionism from Shanker as well, is still slower, more cautious, and far more bureaucratic. Shanker was routinely reelected every two years. The NEA now limits its presidents to three four-year terms, which, of course, is one reason why the NEA's well-paid bureaucrats are so much more powerful.

There is a story, which may be apocryphal, about the dancer Isadora Duncan proposing marriage to George Bernard Shaw. With her body and his brains, she is supposed to have said, they could produce perfect children. Shaw supposedly replied: "But what if they have my body and your brains?" The story is not entirely apt. The new organization, if it happens, will certainly have the NEA's bulk. But so far there is no assurance that it will have anything like Shanker's smarts, vision, and political savvy. •

America's flawed new military doctrine.

BATTLE WARY

By Andrew J. Bacevich and Lawrence F. Kaplan

The Bible recounts that, after conquering Jericho, Joshua sent a party to reconnoiter toward Ai. Upon returning, the scouts assured their commander that this quarter of the Promised Land would fall easily. There would be no need to use the entire army. "Spare the whole people such a toil," the scouts urged. "The enemy are not many." Joshua detached only a token force to subdue the region. But the people of Ai, unimpressed with the reputation of Joshua's army, resisted fiercely and turned back the attackers. They pursued the Israelites to a place called Shebarim, where "they made havoc of them."

Today, the United States is ambling toward a Shebarim of its own. Barely seven years after the triumph in Desert Storm, American military thought and practice have lapsed into posturing and willful self-delusion. As a result, the world's only superpower seems bent on forfeiting its capacity to use military power effectively. The problem is not a lack of capability. The problem is confusion—at the top—regarding the utility of force as an instrument of policy.

To be sure, military activism has been emblematic of the Clinton style of governance. The president who, as a young man, loathed the military has employed it more often, for more varied purposes, and in a wider variety of circumstances than any commander-in-chief since Franklin Roosevelt: periodically flinging threats or missiles at Iraq; fighting (and losing) a small, but bloody, conflict in Somalia; dispatching troops to democratize Haiti; embarking on an open-ended deployment to Bosnia; responding (belatedly) to genocide in Rwanda; and sending U.S. forces into zones of instability from Kuwait to the Taiwan Strait.

The administration's responses to successive crises and its justifications for those actions (or nonactions)

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have created an emergent military paradigm. The paradigm has four basic principles. The first is faith in technology. American military supremacy is clear-cut, genuine, and indisputable. In an earlier age, heavy industry testified to the nation's military might. Today, the U.S. comparative advantage in exploiting the information revolution for military purposes serves an analogous function. The second principle is confidence in the potential of a militarily dominant power to overawe would-be opponents—in administration parlance, "diplomacy backed by force." Simply wielding the "big stick"—aircraft carriers steaming toward Taiwan or the rapid deployment of troops to Kuwait—should suffice to bring all but the most obdurate adversaries to their senses. That anyone should get hurt in the process is unnecessary, pointless, and even counterproductive.

When threats do not suffice, the U.S. uses force as a precision instrument: this is the third principle. Thus, the new paradigm inclines the United States to expend military power in increments. The ideal U.S. operation is limited in purpose, scope, duration, and effect. It minimizes the risk of casualties (whether ours or theirs), avoids collateral damage, precludes any possibility of meaningful retaliation or the danger of "quagmire," skirts moral ambiguities, and achieves its desired effect through suasion rather than brute strength. Such episodes are not to be confused with waging war, a concept that is antiquated and obsolete.

The final principle—a corollary of the third—is to employ ground forces only as a last resort. This principle manifests itself in an inclination to intervene reluctantly, late in the game, and then on a massive scale. It also manifests itself in tendencies, once troops deploy, to subordinate their nominal mission to the imperative of "force protection" and to seek withdrawal at the earliest conceivable opportunity. The new American military paradigm values soldiers on the ground less as units of fighting power than as a constabulary or a symbol of political resolve.

This paradigm responds to multiple needs unrelated to national security as such. It comforts the sensibilities of officials who have distaste for things military but find themselves in command of a juggernaut. It testifies to their virtue and good intentions. It offers assurance that U.S. military power serves not only national interests but also the interests of all humanity. No one has espoused this view more vigorously than Madeleine Albright. During the most recent Iraq crisis, the secretary of state proclaimed: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future."

Politically, the new military paradigm has served the administration well. Through an eventful first term as commander-in-chief, President Clinton violated its principles only once and suffered his sole bona fide disaster—the bloody slaughter of crack American troops by the ragtag forces of Mohammed Farah Aideed in October 1993. The president promptly cut his losses, calling off the war, bringing the troops home, and blaming the United Nations. He has not strayed from the new paradigm since.

Beyond the political realm, however, the new doctrine has had pernicious effects. Ideally, a nation's concept of how to employ military power derives from strategy: a realistic appraisal of interests and threats and of means and ends. Unfortunately, the new American military paradigm has evolved in response to political rather than strategic imperatives. Obfuscation rather than clarity has resulted, Albright's boosterism offering a case in point.

The most recent confrontation with Saddam Hussein—in which the administration conducted a de facto plebiscite on the advisability of military action against Iraq—exposed the true extent of American confusion over the effective employment of military power. When Saddam in late 1997 refused to submit to further U.N. weapons inspections, the administration's first response sounded tough. Clinton vowed this time that if force were required the United States would "eliminate" Iraq's capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMD). An ostentatious build-up of U.S. forces in the Gulf ensued. The media reported in detail the comings (and goings) of American aircraft carriers and the movement—by quantity and type—of warplanes. Press reports described the extent and the schedule of the American deployment, provided details of which allies would (or would not) offer assistance, and assessed the capabilities and limitations of forces assembling in the region. The administration revealed everything except H-hour and the actual target plan.

Yet, even as the build-up proceeded, the Clinton paradigm began to assert itself. In order to insure the elimination of Iraq's WMD program, would the administration use ground forces? Absolutely not. Even with precision weapons, could air power alone actually destroy the entire Iraqi WMD program? Probably not. Would the administration consider targeting those elements, such as Iraq's Republican Guard, that sustained Saddam's hold on power? Not really, given the likelihood of U.S. losses and civilian casualties. The administration argued itself into a "surgical" campaign of only four or five days and approximately 500 sorties. This effort, dubbed Desert Thunder by the Pentagon, would, at most, "diminish" Iraq's WMD capabilities.

At the Pentagon on February 17, Clinton explained that Saddam "threatens the safety of his people, the stability of his region, and the security of the rest of us." If the Iraqi dictator were to succeed in acquiring weapons of mass destruction, the president declared, "some day, some way, I guarantee you, he'll use the arsenal." Yet removing this threat lay beyond U.S. capabilities. "Let me be clear," the president said. "A military operation cannot destroy all the weapons of mass destruction capacity." At best, we could leave Saddam "significantly worse off than he is now."

The contradictions intensified the very next day at

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the now-notorious town-hall meeting in Columbus, Ohio. Albright, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and national security adviser Sandy Berger tried to make the case for Desert Thunder before a national and international audience. The only sure way to get rid of Saddam was through invasion, noted Berger. But such an operation would "require a major land campaign and risk large losses of our soldiers" and was therefore unthinkable. The danger Saddam posed to America's children and grandchildren notwithstanding, "our strategic interests as a nation" would be best served simply by "containing the threat Iraq now poses."

For his part, Cohen freely acknowledged that the scaling back of American military plans had been dictated by a reluctance to accept even minimal casualties. Responding to a question posed by an American soldier, Cohen vowed, "we intend to take care of you ... we intend to minimize the risk to your lives.... We will do our level best to minimize the risk of harm." Cohen concluded: "That's why it has been very carefully circumscribed in terms of the mission itself." Nor were American casualties the only limiting factor. Berger promised that, in designing Desert Thunder, the administration had "taken every precaution that we can to minimize civilian casualties." (As Albright would write in *Newsweek*, "We care about the Iraqi people.")

What the administration really envisioned, in short, was "diplomacy backed by force." That is, it still hoped that flaunting the big stick would suffice to cow Saddam. In that sense, the administration readily conceded the initiative to its adversary. "Saddam holds the keys to ending this crisis," Cohen admitted. "He holds the keys in his hands."

The catastrophe at Columbus showed how the Clinton team had worked itself into an untenable position. It had portrayed the threat as malignant, and, at the same time, adhering to the tenets of its military doctrine, it had opted for equivocal action. "We are talking about using military force," Albright argued, "but we are not talking about a war. That is an important distinction." But the administration's insistence upon such distinctions pointed either to embarrassing failure or unwanted escalation. As in Mogadishu, but this time with far larger consequences, the president cut his losses. Albright flew secretly to New York to ask Kofi Annan to devise the fig leaf that would permit the United States to back down.

The effects of this episode will ripple well beyond the Persian Gulf. The defective military paradigm that gave birth to this failure is unlikely to pass away when the second Clinton term ends. It may be a principal legacy of the Clinton years, creating precedents and public expectations that could shackle the next president and the one after that. Deluded about what can be accomplished through the mere possession of military strength, and advertising their fears as if they were virtues, those who guide the fortunes of the world's only superpower have embarked upon an experiment in virtual disarmament. •

The corporate takeover of foreign policy.

THE SANCTIONS SELLOUT

By Jacob Heilbrunn

As President Clinton prepares for the upcoming June Sino-American summit, he and national security adviser Samuel R. Berger are working overtime to neutralize the domestic human rights lobby. First, the administration declared that China would soon sign a new United Nations covenant on human rights. Then, it touted the release of dissident Wang Dan as a victory for its policy of constructive engagement. Most recently, Clinton met with 60 Christian evangelical leaders at the White House to attack the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act, which would cut off subsidized loans and "non-humanitarian" aid to countries that systematically harass religious believers. Clinton, unaware that Elaine Sciolino of *The New York Times* was present, pointed to sanctions laws against Russia, Cuba, and Iran as examples of the dire consequences a China bill might have: "What always happens if you have automatic sanctions legislation is it puts enormous pressure on whoever is in the executive branch to fudge an evaluation of the facts," said the president.

Ever since the passage of the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, which Clinton had resisted but hastily signed after Havana shot down two unarmed planes piloted by anti-Castro Cuban-Americans in international waters, the administration has been caught between two policies of appeasement. The first policy is to use economic ties to transform dictators into democrats; the second is to placate the domestic constituencies that advocate

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unilateral sanctions against those same dictators. So far, the administration has acceded on paper to measures such as Helms-Burton or the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act and then employed national security waivers to prevent them from actually taking effect. Are Canada and the European Union doing business with Cuba or Iran? Then fudge. Is China illegally buying advanced missile technology from American companies? Fudge again.

But, with the proliferation of sanctions legislation, the administration is becoming apprehensive. The persecution bill, for instance, would establish an independent White House monitor who would simply declare that, yes, blatant religious persecution is taking place in a particular country or, no, tolerance prevails. There is no room for fudging.

The stakes are anything but minor. The thrust of foreign policy itself is at issue. President Clinton and Berger have always viewed trade as a means of creating a peaceful and democratic global order. Trade, so it is supposed, can bind nations such as China, or even North Korea, into international structures that will encourage them to observe liberal norms of behavior. On Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recent trip to Beijing, the most important member of her delegation was Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky—who tried, unsuccessfully, to secure Chinese commitments to human rights that would smooth the path for membership in the World Trade Organization.

The belief that interdependence brings peace dates back to Montesquieu. It may work among democracies. But "constructive engagement" of dictatorships? During the cold war, proponents of engagement with the Kremlin argued that trade would lead to freedom inside the Iron Curtain. But, if anything, the denial of high technology to the Soviet Union and its East European satellites, which sought to evade restrictions on supercomputers and other goodies, helped bring them down. Sanctions also had a devastating effect on apartheid in South Africa. Now, as states like China, Cuba, and Burma seek to attract foreign investment and the moral approbation that comes with it, the lessons of the cold war may well have acquired a fresh relevance.

The Clinton administration, however, has drawn a different lesson. During the cold war, Sandy Berger and company maintained that economic engagement was crucial. Now they seek to apply that approach to all repressive countries. To do this, the Clinton administration has fought sanctions in Congress, and it has fudged when the time came to enforce them. More recently, it has gone a step further and encouraged the creation of a new and potent business lobby—whose aim is to portray unilateral sanctions as undesirable, unworkable, and, above all, un-American.

"*Unilateral Sanctions—They Hurt U.S.*," reads the red-white-and-blue boomerang distributed by the leading lobbying group against sanctions, USA*Engage. The organization was first organized by a powerful Democratic insider: Anne L. Wexler, the lobbyist and former aide to President Jimmy Carter. Since its founding in April 1997, USA*Engage has amassed over 600 members—including multinationals such as IBM, Unocal, Boeing, and Mobil. Its chairman is William C. Lane, a business executive at Caterpillar and a member of the Executive Committee of Americans for Humanitarian Trade with Cuba. Frank Kittredge, the vice chairman, is president of the National Foreign Trade Council. Its legal team includes Sandy Berger's old firm, Hogan & Hartson.

To defend American business involvement in dictatorial countries abroad, USA*Engage promotes an upbeat message. USA*Engage, as the name suggests, seeks to equate trade with internationalism, unilateral sanctions with isolationism. It doesn't oppose multilateral sanctions; it simply doesn't want the U.S. to go it alone, to find itself isolated, losing business, antagonizing its allies. Its officials go on to argue that, far from being avaricious supporters of dictatorships, corporations are the last internationalists—nothing less than a new advance guard for democracy.

The idea is simple: Economic ties can lead to freedom. In a full-page ad in the January 16 *Wall Street Journal*, for example, USA*Engage used the occasion of Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba to urge an end to the island's economic isolation. "The United States," the advertisement said, "has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership through engagement.... Engagement can be a powerful force when pursued at all levels—political, diplomatic, economic, charitable, religious, educational, and cultural." One official at USA*Engage says, "We try to be as careful as possible to talk about engagement. Business has developed an argument that goes beyond pure self-interest, that represents the national interest." The flurry of sanctions passed by a Republican Congress alarmed business. "We decided to create a business coalition to try to change the climate in the summer of 1996, a year and a half after the Republican Congress took over, to go on the offensive," says the official.

In the beginning, there was oil. A former congressional trade staffer says that USA*Engage really began as a front group for Unocal, which has been the target of protest because of its alleged use of forced labor in Burma, where the company runs a natural-gas pipeline in tandem with the country's government. "When I look at Unocal in Burma or Shell in Nigeria or Occidental Petroleum, which got a waiver from sanctions against Sudan, this raises the question whether they are really complaining about sanctions," the former staffer says. "Really, it's oil barons who want to operate without regard to human rights or labor practices."

But USA*Engage has worked hard to project a less self-serving image, stressing the toll unilateral sanctions might take on the U.S. economy. In March, for example, William C. Lane testified before the Senate that sanctions have hurt Caterpillar—and, by extension, American workers. In the 1980s, he said, sanctions against the Soviets cost Caterpillar access to the Soviet tractor market, and Japanese competitors quickly moved in. Not

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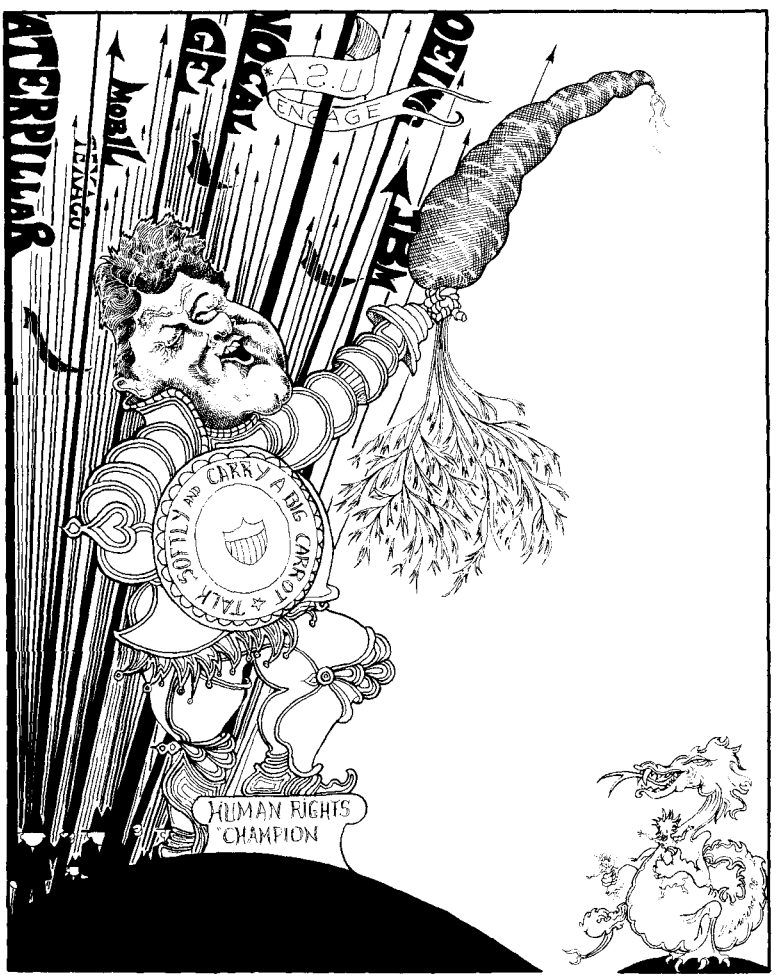
only did this effectively move 12,000 man-years of work from Illinois to Japan, he said, but Caterpillar came to be seen as an unreliable supplier, giving Komatsu of Japan a leg up elsewhere in the world. Today, the U.S. government discourages firms from exporting products for the construction of the Three Gorges Dam in China because the massive project will uproot tens of millions, destroy precious historic sites, and ravage the environment. This stance prompted Lane to ask why Congress was, in effect, preventing U.S. firms from getting a piece of the world's biggest construction job. The U.S. has sanctions against the Sudan and Cuba; the Sudan, Lane said, would make for a lucrative export market and thus create more jobs and better pay at home. (In March, Caterpillar executives met with Fidel Castro to discuss bulldozers; Mobil and Texaco, not to mention USA*Engage members, were official guests of Castro as well.)



BILL CLINTON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

To give its crusade some intellectual heft, USA*Engage has also reached out to think tanks such as the Institute for International Economics, which issued a report on sanctions at USA*Engage's April 1997 press conference. The report said that sanctions cost the American economy between $15 billion and $20 billion and resulted in 250,000 jobs lost in 1995 alone. Writing in *Mother Jones*, Ken Silverstein reported that the National Association of Manufacturers, a USA*Engage member, funded a study by Georgetown University law professor Barry Carter that described, in the association's words, the "steep price tag for U.S. commercial interests." The Heritage Foundation has weighed in against sanctions as well. And, in June, the Cato Institute will hold a conference titled "Collateral Damage: the Economic Cost of U.S. Foreign Policy." One of the main speakers will be William C. Lane. USA*Engage has also wooed religious organizations, such as the National Council of Churches, which opposes Arlen Specter and Frank Wolf's bill on religious persecution.

Are these efforts paying off? In 1996, one USA*Engage official points out, 23 sanctions were put in place; in 1997, only two countries, Sudan and Colombia, were sanctioned. "This year," the official says, "there were reverses. Sanctions were lifted against Colombia and Vietnam, and there is a recognition that there is a bias toward engagement toward Cuba.... You could see some China sanctions lifted in June" when Clinton visits Beijing.

One of the instruments that USA*Engage hopes to use to blunt unilateral sanctions is a bill sponsored by Lee Hamilton and Richard Lugar. The bill would not prevent a president from imposing sanctions, but it would require, among other things, that the economic costs for American industry and agriculture be calculated. It also contains a "sunset provision" that would require the president to renew sanctions every two years, or they would lapse automatically. Andrew Semol, a senior adviser to Lugar, says, "What I particularly find attractive about the exercise is that it's a pro-engagement policy. We can impose sanctions on really egregious countries, but there is an implicit philosophy that through engagement we're likely to have as much influence as disengagement."

The bill is unlikely to pass anytime soon, since enactment would mean ceding congressional foreign policy prerogatives to the president. But USA*Engage and its business members have been quite successful at lobbying the Clinton administration to kill sanctions in other ways—thanks in no small part to the influence of Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat. (According to several leading human rights advocates, Eizenstat was involved in the creation of USA*Engage. Eizenstat's office denies this.)

One Eizenstat initiative came in September 1997 in the form of a newly created "sanctions working group" of the State Department's Advisory Committee on International Economic Policy. The group issued a report asserting that sanctions "often are imposed rapidly and reactively, without adequate deliberation and understanding of either the potential impact on the target's behavior or the domestic, foreign, and economic costs

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of sanctions." The document came with the standard disclaimer that it did not represent the official views of the State Department. Who were the advisers on the committee? Boeing, DuPont, General Electric, United Technologies, and a number of other companies. The AFL-CIO, also a member, issued a lonely dissent. The advisory called for a sanctions review committee, within the National Economic Council and the National Security Council, which has since been established and is reviewing every sanctions law passed by Congress.

Testifying before Congress in October 1997, Eizenstat invoked the advisory committee's report. According to Eizenstat, the "illustrative matrix of foreign policy tools" devised by his advisory committee offered a valuable road map to sanctions. Eizenstat said that sanctions "should be used only when carefully considered by both the executive and legislative branches as to their effectiveness, after all benefits, costs, and consequences are analyzed...." The State Department has attempted to put this approach into action when it comes to various sanctions, whether it is the Sudan or Cuba. Eizenstat's deputy, Bill Ramsay, says Washington lobbyist Christine Bolton was key in negotiating with the Europeans to stave off a confrontation over Helms-Burton. Bolton puts it this way: Ramsay "understands the complexities better than anyone in the administration."

Currently, the main preoccupation of sanction opponents is the Religious Persecution Act. The administration wants the Senate to back a substitute bill by Don Nickles that would allow the White House much more discretion in making determinations about persecution. But, of course, the Clinton administration must tread carefully. Religious persecution is a sensitive issue. That's why USA*Engage is so helpful—it has more freedom to tackle the arguments of human rights advocates.

And, indeed, USA*Engage has taken a more public stand against sanctions. It is, in a very real sense, the administration's bad cop. USA*Engage has worked closely with religious groups and leaders that oppose the bill like the National Council of Churches and Billy Graham. (The council's associate general secretary, Albert M. Pennybacker, declared in 1996 that acts which might be seen as "persecution" could really be an attempt to "preserve authentic religious and cultural traditions.") And USA*Engage has campaigned directly against the Religious Persecution Act; a September 9, 1997, letter to Frank Wolf signed by Frank Kittredge and other business leaders spelled out the logic behind USA*Engage: "Just as missionaries cannot accomplish their goals by withdrawing from the mission field, America cannot expect to be an influence for religious freedom and human rights by removing itself from a country.... Our stepping out of this increasingly interconnected world and erecting sanctions will have little or no impact on those who wish to persecute others. It will, however, have a significantly negative impact on the United States."

To be sure, unilateral sanctions can multiply crazily. Many cities and states, for example, now have their own sanctions. Chicago and New York are considering divesting their pension funds from Switzerland because of the Swiss banks' treatment of Holocaust accounts. Takoma Park, Maryland, boycotts Burmese goods because of human rights violations. Heavily Cuban-American Dade County, Florida, has a selective purchasing and investment law against Cuba.

USA*Engage is planning to sue Massachusetts over its anti-Burma law—and it may have a case. The constitutionality of these measures is dubious. "If we are to be one nation in any respect," wrote James Madison in *Federalist 42*, "it clearly ought to be in respect to other nations." Indeed, under the supremacy clause and the doctrine of preemption, nonfederal organizations cannot pursue measures contrary to federal policy. The Supreme Court has upheld vast powers for the federal government in the foreign sphere, most notably in 1968, in *Zschernig* v. *Miller*, a case that struck down an Oregon probate law on inheritances in the East Bloc.

But what about the larger argument against unilateral sanctions? Are they invariably costly and self-defeating? The answer is: It depends. No doubt sanctions carry economic costs; they pose an impediment to the global system of free trade that the U.S. has championed since World War II. On the other hand, sanctions clearly have an effect on target nations. One thing that sanctions against Iran and Libya and Cuba have accomplished, for example, is to create a more uncertain business climate. The sanctions may not bring these malignant regimes down single-handedly, but they can create higher costs for them. Otherwise, why would they fight against sanctions? America remains the prime purveyor of high technology, and many countries remain desperate for access to it. The mere threat of sanctions may also be enough to induce a country to reconsider its course; Clinton could have considered using them against the Serbs when they stirred up trouble in Kosovo. So, when the Institute for International Economics declares that the U.S. has lost up to $20 billion in trade, it is not taking into account the costs to the regimes that are the targets of sanctions or the benefits of bringing disruptive countries to heel.

The flip side of this argument is the theory, propagated by USA*Engage and its supporters, that business is an avatar of democracy. This is a far cry from the bad old days, when the Eisenhower administration staged a coup in Guatemala on behalf of United Fruit, ITT helped topple the freely elected, but Marxist, Allende government in Chile, and American businesses were active in countries such as South Africa. Now, in *Foreign Affairs*, Harvard Business School professor Deborah L. Spar argues that U.S. multinationals are actually on the side of the angels: "They bring jobs, capital, technology, know-how, management techniques, labor relations, and administrative structures that are unlikely to depart too dramatically from U.S. standards." Writing in the December 1996 *Cardozo Law Review*, Peter Spiro observes that pressure exerted by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty

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International, and other organizations has been beneficial: "Whatever the motivation, the corporate response is plainly transcending mere public relations."

But are corporations functioning as closet human rights agitators? Or are they mainly interested in political stability? A staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee points out that, on a recent visit to Suharto's Indonesia, she challenged an American company to explain what it does to protect its workers when they are harassed by the government. The response? Nothing. Similarly, in 1994, Chrysler Corporation threatened to fire one of its workers for absences; it turned out he had missed work while detained by the Chinese government on political charges. (When human rights groups intervened, Chrysler decided to take no action against the worker.) If anything, repressive regimes have the upper hand on American companies since they can always threaten to confiscate their assets. It's an inherent conflict of interest and a logical tension as well.

Business is also unwilling to acknowledge that, in countries ruled by dictatorships, no distinction between regime and economy exists. They are one and the same. Doing business in Indonesia usually means doing business with the Suharto family. Put otherwise, Suharto is really running a business empire. Or take Cuba. Fidel Castro is Cuba. He controls the government, and the government controls any economic activity on the island. Canadian, Spanish, and Italian firms that engage in tourism or mining activity there are funneling large percentages of their payroll directly to Castro's government; in return, they receive a docile, state-selected labor force. If these firms refused to play along, they would instantly lose their privileges or be kicked out. How on earth does this kind of "engagement" benefit ordinary Cubans? Contemplating access to this corrupt "market," American businessmen offer self-serving platitudes. Frank Kittredge told Congress that "last week over fifty U.S. businessmen traveled to Cuba to meet with top Cuban officials. The American delegation saw firsthand the harmful effects of a society isolated from American influence. It's time to completely overhaul America's policy toward Cuba." What Kittredge saw "firsthand" were the disastrous results of 40 years of a Soviet-style command economy.

Then there is Burma. The Burmese State Law and Order Restoration Council—which operates that billion dollar pipeline with Unocal—is not just a government but a business operation. When USA*Engage decries unilateral sanctions against Burma, it is not just seeking business. It is actually pushing for Washington to adopt a friendly policy toward the junta itself because, without such a relationship, access to Burma's remote mineral, oil, and timber resources would be denied. Since Burma is not exactly a mecca of free enterprise, U.S. firms supply technological know-how and cash to the SLORC, keeping it, so to speak, in business.

Ultimately, these regimes crave the moral imprimatur that only Washington can confer. Maureen Aung-Thwin of the Open Society Institute's Burma Project observes that sanctions and disapprobation are a useful club. The Burmese, she emphasizes, devote enormous time and resources to attempting to polish their reputation in the U.S. and at the United Nations. "Why do they do this?" she asks. "The Burmese need our approval. They can't crawl back into their shell."

Certainly one reason the Clinton administration opposes new sanctions laws is that—just like previous administrations—it is wary of congressional encroachment into foreign policy-making. But the Clinton team has gone further than its predecessors. Like USA*Engage, it says that corporate interests *are* the national interest. This has resulted in a new human rights coalition, particularly on the issue of China.

Something similar occurred during the 1970s with the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Congress passed the law to deny the Soviet Union Most Favored Nation trade status until Soviet Jews were free to emigrate. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger opposed it in favor of a détente that focused on economic ties as a way of effecting change in the Soviet Union. But détente went nowhere; the important thing was the system's loss of political legitimacy, which was accomplished both through the denial of normal relations with the West and through the dissidents who rejected the system. China, Burma, Libya, and Cuba don't represent the same global threat to the U.S. as did Moscow, but their contempt for human rights is no different, and denying them undeserved international legitimacy is just as urgent.

Consider the results of the religious delegation Berger and Clinton sent to China in February. The members—Donald Argue, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Reverend Theodore E. McCarrick, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier—met with President Jiang Zemin, visited a model prison in Tibet, and issued a report that lauded the "dialogue" with Beijing. According to Nina Shea of Freedom House: "We've seen more arrests since the trip. They were actually detaining believers during the trip so they couldn't meet with them."

As part of the Clinton administration's all-out battle against the Religious Persecution Act, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright delivered a speech in October at Catholic University. "If we are to be effective in defending the values we cherish," she said, "we must also take into account the perspectives and values of others. We must recognize that our relations with the world are not fully encompassed by any single issue or set of issues." But if America, as Albright has declared, is the "indispensable nation," then religious rights cannot be buried in a heap of relativistic qualifiers.

Sanctions are a tool that can help America keep faith with people struggling against tyrants. They may cost America business. They may fail to change fundamentally a regime's behavior. But they do deny the moral approbation that the world's thugs crave. Until the Clinton administration stops trying to propitiate these regimes, it will keep selling democracy short. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Injustices

A full chronicle of the films made from *Les Misérables* would be very long—long enough to seem appropriate for that mammoth novel. The first American film version was in 1909. The French didn't get around to it until 1912. But both countries have kept versions coming ever since, once as short as 104 minutes (directed by Lewis Milestone, 1952), once as long as 305 minutes (Raymond Bernard, 1934), sometimes in three or four parts. Italy made a version in 1947, Japan in 1950. (I'm ignoring the theater musical, which had its première in Paris in 1980 and has since appeared in other places. The Broadway production opened in March 1987 and has so far given over 4,600 performances.) As recently as 1995 the French did a 178-minute version, directed by Claude Lelouch and starring Jean-Paul Belmondo. Nonetheless, after only a brief breathing space, here is another **Les Misérables** (Columbia), directed by Bille August and starring Liam Neeson. Running time: 129 minutes.

Other celebrated novels have had multiple screen incarnations—*War and Peace, Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary,* to name a few—but none of them approaches Victor Hugo's record. The reasons aren't obscure. *Les Misérables* is, basically, a gigantic appeal for social justice, couched in stirring dramatic terms. It is also about the struggle of a mistreated man as he rises to the top, along with a mortal conflict between this maculate virtuous man and an immaculate pursuing demon. Also there are large elements of religious inspiration, parental love and sacrifice, young love, and political ferment. And all of these matters are carried forward in a large, steady, oceanic sweep.

This extensive menu is exactly the trouble for screen adaptations. The very elements that make film artists' fingers itch are the ones that hobble the results—at least in the (relatively few) versions that I have seen. Everyone who adapts this book knows that, no matter how long the screenplay runs, it must condense mightily. This is a species of torment, really, for those filmmakers who fall in love with this novel, as so many have done. It tempts and it eludes, because of its complexity and its length. The longest film version of a novel that I know is Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* which runs 15 and one-half hours. By and large it's an excellent film and a reasonable presentation of the original, but Alfred Döblin's novel is only 635 widely spaced pages. Hugo's is 1,232 tight pages.

The criterion is not literal completeness but justice. Jean Valjean seeks justice in the novel; audiences seek justice to the novel in any screen version. Fassbinder managed justice to Döblin by commandeering an inordinate amount of time. How much time would an equally full film of Hugo require? Quite apart from the impossible financing requirements, the sheer demands on an audience's time make the project ludicrous.

So this perennially attractive behemoth keeps being served up in compacted versions. The latest attempt had a number of gifted people working on it. The screenplay is by Rafael Yglesias, the novelist who adapted Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* for film. With *Les Misérables* we can sense throughout that Yglesias really responds to the novel and wishes he could do better by it; but he can't. The director, Bille August, is the Dane who did *Pelle the Conqueror* and whom Bergman chose for his screenplay *The Best Intentions.* Those films were near-miracles of aptness and insight, but here August does merely adequate work, as if he were hurrying under pressure or uncomfortable with the materials or both. The same is true of the cinematographer Jörgen Persson, who has often worked with August. The production design is by Anna Asp, the costumes by Gabrielle Pescucci, both of whom have done better designs elsewhere. The score by Basil Poledouris has some touches of tidal swell, which help but cannot redeem the picture.

The biggest disappointment, the central flaw, is Liam Neeson's performance as Jean Valjean. Presumably it was for Neeson that the film was made, quite understandably since in every way he is fit for the part. But no moment, and he is given plenty of big ones, really registers emotionally. His whole performance seems a simulacrum, as much a synopsis as the script. The actor who did Oskar Schindler and Michael Collins and Ethan Frome with such immediacy doesn't realize Jean Valjean.

Uma Thurman plays Fantine, the wretched woman who becomes a prostitute in order to support her illegitimate daughter. Thurman does no worse in

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Marius and Jeannette. *A working-class love story set in Marseilles today but with the atmosphere of a 1930s French film. Some sentimentality but much good sentiment. (Reviewed 5/4/98)* **Primary Colors.** *Presidential politicking in the Clinton era. Too realistic to be entirely funny, but John Travolta and Emma Thompson sparkle as Mr. and Mrs. Candidate. (4/20/98)* **Wild Man Blues.** *Woody Allen is more interesting than usual in this documentary about his European tour with a jazz band. (5/11/98)* **Wilde.** *The life and trials of Oscar—much of them, anyway. The change in social acceptance of homosexuality in recent years gives the story a new perspective. The cast, especially Stephen Fry as Wilde, is first-class. (5/18/98)*—**SK**

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the part than a dozen others might have done, so costumed and made up. Claire Danes is remarkably unappealing as that daughter when grown, and her lover Marius, played by Hans Matheson, is just a puppet in the plot. The one memorable performance, the only one that stings with verity, is the Javert of Geoffrey Rush. Rush played the eccentric pianist in *Shine*, and here he is a different kind of mental case—the cruelly dogged, near-psychopathic policeman who pursues Valjean. Javert is in a sense an easier part than Valjean because, having fewer colors, it is easier to encompass. (Besides, bad people are always easier and juicier to play than good ones.) But Rush is icily passionate in the role.

Now for next year's version.

Healing by Killing (New Yorker) is a kind of appendix to Lanzmann's *Shoah*. This documentary by the Israeli filmmaker Nitzan Aviram aims, as Lanzmann did, to get on film the presence and testimony of some survivors and some perpetrators of the Holocaust. The particular difference is that all the victims seen or discussed here were not Jews.

The specific subjects are sterilization and euthanasia. The film begins and ends with a German who was sterilized by the Nazis in the late 1930s and now lives out his life alone in the country, a waif of fate. Then, with glimpses of newsreels and photos and glimpses of relevant places as they look now, the film explores the lives of two German physicians in Nazi Germany. One of them, who rose from professional mediocrity to become the head of the euthanasia program at Treblinka, is long dead but is vividly remembered. (We see, too, photographs of some of the mentally or physically impaired people he took care of.) The other physician is a gynecologist who devised ways to sterilize women at Auschwitz. He is interviewed by Aviram and certainly agrees now that the Hippocratic oath should be, should have been, respected. How comforting.

Robert Jay Lifton, whose writings on the subject of Nazi doctors prompted this film, offers some helpful comments, but the materials speak for themselves. One item does something more than speak: the gynecologist reveals that when times were hard and people needed meat, the corpses of the euthanasia victims at Auschwitz were made available.

The euthanasia program, carried out (in Nazi terms) on Aryans, was put in place in September 1939. The Final Solution, aimed at non-Aryans, was settled in January 1942. This film helps to illuminate the road from the first program to the second. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

Calamity Jane

It is good to have Jane Alexander back on stage (in **Honour** at the Belasco) after her calamitous tenure at the National Endowment for the Arts. The sixth head of this agency, she was the first with any artistic background to be appointed to this precarious position. Alexander's predecessors were shrewd bureaucrats who may not have known how to act or sing or dance, but they had considerably more experience in the art of tickling the congressional ego.

Alexander believed that she could gain respect for the arts through tireless advocacy of even the most marginal creative expressions, and through her own charm and graciousness. She was wrong. On her watch, appropriations for the NEA were slashed almost in half. Indeed, its very existence was placed in jeopardy. While the chairman was touring the country praising needlework and canoe-building, the Washington lawmakers were busy rending and chewing the NEA's near-lifeless body.

Ironically, Alexander's political tribulations have turned this respected actress into a Broadway star, her name spelled out in lights over the title of Joanna Murray-Smith's new play. Playing the lead in *Honour*, however, presents Alexander with a new cultural dilemma: how to breathe life into an essentially contrived and artificial play. Like her work with the NEA, the effort is noble and fruitless. As an evening in the theater, *Honour* is not exactly a calamity. It is written with some wit and sophistication, being essentially a sex comedy with a moral theme. But this very mixture of genres sinks the play, as well as confusing the director and the actors about its appropriate style.

Some of this confusion is suggested in the title. Murray-Smith is an Austra-

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lian, which may explain why she spells "Honour" with a "u." (Her heroine's name is spelled without it.) Mostly developed in this country, the play at times seems to be rooted in another culture. Its dialogue proceeds by fits and starts, hesitancies, and interrupted thoughts, David Mamet-style; but its sour urbanity seems to be borrowed from Noel Coward and Harold Pinter, and its emotional dynamics from Terence Rattigan. These echoes, coupled with the trans-pacific quality of the characters, leaves one with the impression that something may have been lost in mid-ocean.

At one point in *Honour*, Honor's husband Gus, a prize-winning journalist, tries to explain to his young mistress the difference between naturalism and realism. His explanation is accurate, but the knowledge is not transferred to the play. *Honour* is animated by an idea rather than a perception of reality, by an attitude about life rather than any capacity to evoke it. And the idea is hardly original—namely, that nothing has prepared an earlier generation of women for their husbands' mid-life crises.

Soon after being interviewed by a handsome but rapacious feminist journalist, Gus falls in love with her and abandons his middle-aged wife of 32 years—hardly gracious of him when she sacrificed her own career as a poet to support his calling. This treachery enrages Honor, who fixes Gus with the kind of icy contempt that Alexander might have privately felt for Jesse Helms. It also depresses her daughter Sophie, but Gus, displaying an inordinate lack of self-knowledge, has managed to persuade himself that his passion for Claudia is going to renew his waning sexual powers.

Gus has always prided himself on his journalistic integrity. Still, he is willing to trade this integrity for 15 minutes of fame because, like Solness in *The Master Builder*, he feels the younger generation knocking at the door ("They'll bring in some 30-year-old who peppers his reflections with references to deconstruction and *The Brady Bunch*"). Toppled by a member of the younger generation as callow as Hilda Wangel, he too falls from the tower. Gus is unable to work up enough enthusiasm for Claudia's fiction-writing, and she, inevitably, throws him out. When he tries to return to Honor, who has resumed her poetic career, she tells him that it's now too late.

In spite of the Ibsen parallels, there is nothing in this play that would have been inappropriate on *As the World Turns*, except for the literacy of the dialogue and a certain degree of character development. Honor, who is preternaturally wise, balanced, and kind, if excessively dour throughout, also gains some independence in her new role as abandoned wife. She begins, for example, to manage her own investments. ("You've never been interested in money," remarks Gus, to which Honor answers, "And you've never been interested in adultery—isn't change a thrill?")

That's a pretty fair example of the aphoristic balances and antitheses that characterize the dialogue, though the playwright's recurrent aperçus are occasionally leavened with an obscenity ("At a certain age men don't enjoy fucking, but they like to be seen to be fucking"), which gives an air of modernity to an otherwise dated play.

So does the ambivalent production. On a handsome neutral setting by Derek McLane—a creamy ocean of carpeted steps with a Magritte sky glimpsed through a window—Gerald Gutierrez, the director, has staged a number of episodes that proceed at the pace of brittle comedy while at the same time trying to tease out an emotional subtext. Laura Linney, as the heartless siren Claudia, manages only the brittleness, punching her lines with all the subtlety of a carnival barker (her strident delivery is underscored by her fire-engine red jacket and miniskirt). Robert Foxworth agonizes rather monotonously as Gus, though Enid Graham has some authentic moments as his daughter Sophie. But Jane Alexander is the only actor on stage who manages to be witty and moving, because it is she who knows best how to control her character's disappointment at the level of an unuttered scream. I suspect she learned that during her time at the NEA.

Shakespeare's R&J (John Houseman Studio Theatre) is a production of *Romeo and Juliet* performed by four men, and if that sounds like a stunt, let me quickly disabuse you. Though perhaps not the best-acted, it is nevertheless the most concentrated, most spirited, most touching version of this play I've yet seen. Directed by Joe Calarco, *R&J* is set in a repressive Catholic preparatory school where the uniformed boys march in militaristic rhythms, parse Latin verbs, square hypotenuses, memorize "Thou shalt nots," and heed the church bells summoning them to prayers. They also learn a catechism of sexual differences: "The business of a man is to govern the world and the business of a woman is to charm and influence it."

After hours, they peruse a forbidden book called *Romeo and Juliet* which will teach them otherwise, snatching the volume out of each other's hands as if it were a relay-race baton. Gradually shedding their school uniforms, they begin by chanting Puck's last speech about dreams from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, then launch into a reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, using a shiny red cloth as their only prop and their wooden desks as the only furniture. What transpires is the initiation of boy-men into the mysteries of sexual love.

Romeo is played by the raven-haired Greg Shamie, Juliet by the honey-haired, blue-eyed Daniel J. Shore. The other parts are performed by the redheaded youth Sean Dugan (most notably Mercutio, Lady Capulet, and Friar Laurence) and by the short-haired Danny Gurwin (most notably Tybalt and the Nurse). All of them seem to be in their early twenties. Talk about nontraditional casting! Talk about suspension of disbelief! It is curious and it is exhilarating how quickly you accept the characterizations, for all the stylized playing of the older roles (the Nurse bent from the waist, Friar Laurence with a game leg).

Shore's Juliet has such a simple sweetness and radiance, later leavened with such passionate yearning, that you begin to understand how effectively boys might have played the female roles in Shakespeare's time. There is not a trace of camp in this performance, for all the mouth-to-mouth kissing, nor is there anything particularly gay in the acting of Dugan's Mercutio, despite his obvious attraction to Romeo. What director Calarco is trying to demonstrate is how adolescent boys awaken to their own sexual stirrings. "Personally," he writes in a program note, "I think all the boys are straight, but by acting out the play, they learn acceptance of all kinds of love."

So, by the way, does the audience. Although the production at times resembles a student exercise, the very absence of elaborate scenery, costumes, and props, not to mention the conscientious miscasting of the roles, makes you listen to this familiar play as if for the first time, helps you experience some of its original energies. It is true that some longer emotional moments (Juliet's death scene, for example) are not as convincingly handled by this cast as those requiring fresh, puppy-dog energy (the first meeting of Romeo and Juliet at the Capulet's ball, the balcony scene, the death of Mercutio). But there is hardly a moment when you are not engrossed in the destiny of the doomed characters.

At the end, after the red cloth that has served the characters in so many ceremonial ways has been placed over the dead bodies of the two lovers, the church bells recall the boys to their academic duties. They put on their sweaters and school ties, once again becoming student automatons—except for the boy who played Romeo. Placing the red cloth around his shoulders, he repeats Puck's speech, adding "I dreamt a dream tonight . . . I dreamt." He has dreamed a dream of love, which has been shared with the entire audience. •

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The Jerusalem Syndrome

By Hillel Halkin

Damascus Gate by Robert Stone

(Houghton Mifflin, 500 pp., $26)

Robert Stone is a first-rate writer of fiction. He may not have a voice that is unique, but the voice that he does have, while shared with others of his times, has been burnished to a fine tone: spare, tough, sharply observant, capable of genuine lyricism and tenderness. He is a man who has read widely and he cares deeply about his craft; and when one catches traces in his writing of the great originals—an undertone of Hemingway, an occasional riff of Conrad or of Joyce—these are always perfectly modulated. The more is the pity, then, that Stone's new novel, written with his usual skill, is really a rip-off of a country and a tradition that deserve better at his hands.

The Damascus Gate is the English name of one of the main entrances into the old walled city of Jerusalem, a point near where Arab Jerusalem and Jewish Jerusalem meet, and Stone's novel, set in contemporary Israel, takes place in just such an interstice between Israelis and Palestinians, one inhabited by international types in which Israel (and Jerusalem in particular) abounds: journalists, TV crews, diplomats, U.N. staff, international relief and human rights workers, foreign archaeologists and Bible scholars, and Christian missionaries and men of the cloth, to say nothing of religious pilgrims, seekers, and lunatics of all kinds. Judging from my own limited acquaintance with such types, Stone has a keen eye for the condescension with which many of them regard the haplessly quarreling natives among whom they live. And yet few Israelis or Palestinians, it must be said, have much to do with them—which, when it comes to its representational ambitions, is one of *Damascus Gate*'s problems. But I will get back to that.

Renting an apartment in Jerusalem is Christopher Lucas, a freelance American journalist who has come to Israel to do a feature story—exactly about what, he is not sure. The lapsed Catholic son of a Christian-Jewish intermarriage, Lucas has knocked about the world a good bit and seen more than his share of human brutality and idiocy. Like many members of his profession, he is curious by nature and cynical by habit, and the stories that appeal to him are "the ones that expose depravity and duplicity on both sides of supposedly uncompromising sacred struggles. He found such stories reassuring, an affirmation of the universal human spirit. [He] desperately preferred almost anything to blood and soil, ancient loyalty, timeless creeds."

Lucas finally decides to write about the "Jerusalem Syndrome," the known propensity of some pre-psychotic individuals to suffer delusional breakdowns of a religious nature while visiting the Holy City. Then he meets an attractive and street-smart American woman named Sonia Barnes. Sonia is half-Jewish like himself (the other half is black), and has made Israel her home. A part-time nightclub singer, she has mystical sensibilities that originally brought her to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of a Sufi guru named Berger, who dies early on in the novel.

Sonia is not your ordinary American Jewish immigrant. The world she moves in is as international as Lucas's: her friends include Nuala Rice, a pro-Palestinian Irish human rights worker in the Gaza Strip; Raziel ("Razz") Melker, an American Jewish musician and ex-junkie who has also been "a yeshivah student, a Zen monk at Tassajara, a member of a Hebrew-Christian commune" and a follower of Berger's, and is now heavily into Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, and messianic fantasies; and Raziel's Gentile companion Adam De Kuff, a musician too, as well as a Yale graduate and the wealthy heir of an old New Orleans family.

De Kuff, a brilliant though mentally unbalanced polymath whose conversation with Raziel ranges over "Zen and Theravada and the Holy Ghost, the bodhisattvas, the *sefirot* and the Trinity, Pico della Mirandola, Teresa of Avila, Philo, Abulafia, Adam Kadmon, the *Zohar*, the sentience of diamonds, the Shekhinah, the meaning of *tikkun*, [and] Kali and Matronit under the dread designation of

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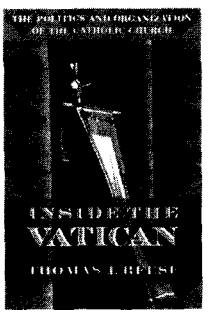
THOMAS J. REESE



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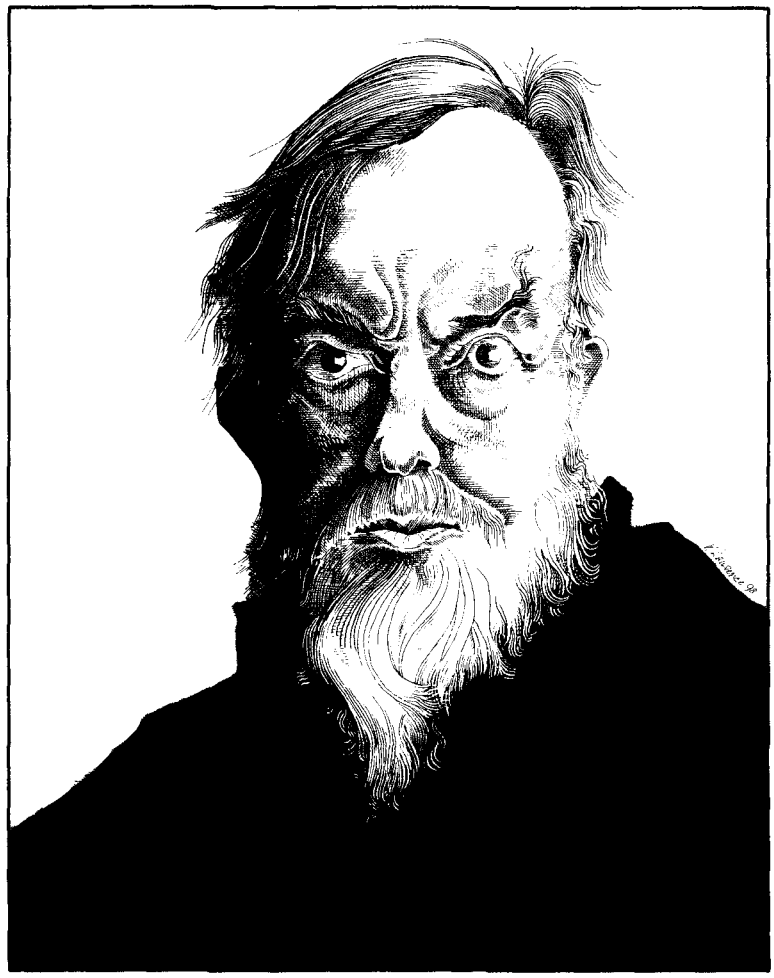
the moon," is both Raziel's mentor and his protégé; for Raziel, while acting the role of the disciple, has convinced De Kuff that De Kuff is the Messiah, and eggs him on to declare himself as such.

What follows is a religious thriller. Lucas falls in love with Sonia, who comes increasingly under the influence of Raziel and De Kuff and joins their little band. While attracted to Lucas, she is, to his immense frustration, less interested in a physical relationship than in the new world about to be born. She seeks to win him over to a belief in that new world. Unpersuaded, he nonetheless gets involved with the group, in part to be close to Sonia and in part to research his subject, of which both Raziel and De Kuff seem outstanding examples. Nor is he so removed from his religious upbringing that something in him does not thrill to the message of an End of Days in which, as De Kuff tells the ragtag audiences that he preaches to in the alleyways of the Old City, "the old world will disappear and things will become the word of God incarnate ... the world will become Torah."

But there are also other messianic forces at work in Jerusalem: ultra-right-wing Jewish nationalists who, assisted by an unsavory British adventurer named Fotheringill, are planning to blow up the Mosque of Omar on the Temple Mount by planting a bomb in the ancient tunnels beneath it, which can be reached from a secret passage opening off the Old City courtyard in which Berger lived. And Sonia, returning with Lucas from a trip to the Galilee—in the course of which De Kuff's messiahship is symbolically revealed, Jesus-like, to his followers—discovers that Raziel is not only still on drugs, which are the real secret of his eschatological visions, but is also in league with the mosque bombers.

The finale of *Damascus Gate* has the kind of fast-moving action that one associates with Stone's fiction. It can make one feel, even while appreciating his adeptness with scenes of violence and suspense, that he is not unaware of a movie industry in Hollywood. Aghast at what is happening, and suspecting sinister forces in the Shabak, the Israeli internal security service, of being in cahoots with the bombers also, Sonia rushes off to the tunnels in the hope of stopping the madness.

Plunged into darkness by a failed flashlight, she wanders blindly through an underground labyrinth of eerie voices and strange phantasms until, following the unexpected appearance of Fotheringill, there is a sudden eruption of gunfire, a tremendous explosion—



ROBERT STONE BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

and a bittersweet ending. Fotheringill, it turns out, is himself working for the Shabak, who have been on the good side all along: having infiltrated the bombers, they arrive with a commando unit in the nick of time to save the mosque. De Kuff is mistaken for a Jew by a rampaging Arab mob and lynched, while Raziel is beaten senseless and taken comatose to the hospital. Lucas, with enough material for ten feature stories, or perhaps even for a novel written under the pseudonym of Robert Stone, decamps for America. Before leaving, he asks Sonia to join him. She replies:

> I love you too, Christopher. I do. But let me tell you something. When I'm *not* here trying to be the best Jew I can be, I'm going to be in Liberia, Rwanda, Tanzania. In Sudan. Cambodia. I don't know, man, Chechenya.... We'll see each other again. But if you have to ask me will you be my wife? I have to say no. I don't want that. I want to be free and I want to be here and Jewish and I want to do my little no-account bit for *tikkun olam*. Even if I use up life that way. I'm sorry, my love. There's no doubt in my mind.

Tikkun olam, which is Hebrew for "repairing the world," is a phrase that, even now that it has been popularized by the Jewish theologian Emil Fackenheim, and even more so in Fackenheim's wake by the left-wing magazine *Tikkun*, might not be expected to turn up in the work of a leading American novelist who has written about drugs, Vietnam, and Central America. But neither would such kabbalistic terms as *shekhinah* (God's femininely imaged presence in the world), *adam kadmon* (the primal Adam), *sefirot* (the ten "spheres" of Creation linking the Godhead with the material universe), or *matronita* ("the Matron," an Aramaic synonym for the Shekhinah). So what gives?

What gives, one supposes, is the current fad for Kabbalah in certain Jewish circles in America and Israel, which suggested to Stone (who already in his Central American novel *A Flag for Sunrise* evinced a fascination with the relation of religious faith, or the anguished lack of it, to revolutionary action) the idea of organizing a novel, dealing with the interplay of mysticism and messianic politics, around kabbalistic ideas and imagery. (Or more precisely, around the ideas and imagery of Lurianic Kabbalah, since the fusion of Kabbalah and messianic fervor, largely absent from the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, the seminal text of kabbalistic tradition, took place in the writings of the sixteenth-century rabbi Isaac Ashkenazi Luria. It was Luria who shifted the emphasis of kabbalism from theosophy, the understanding of divine reality, to theurgy, the transforma-

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tion of it, which he held could be done by acts of spiritual concentration.)

As a way of universalizing his treatment, Stone has made his kabbalistic Messiah not only a Gentile, but a religious syncretist who combines Lurianic doctrines with Sufism, Buddhism, Kundalini Yoga, Christian Millenarianism, and the mystery religions of the ancient Mediterranean. Indeed, as the Israeli psychiatrist Pinchas Obermann explains to Lucas, the schizophrenic De Kuff is thought by his followers to contain within himself all the great spiritual figures in the history of mankind, reincarnated "as a single recurring soul."

Needless to say, although De Kuff's and Raziel's beliefs are little more than the tinsel of rhetoric, there is nothing wrong with staging a novel with the flash of tinsel. What matters in fiction, after all, is what ideas do to characters, not what they are in themselves. The lack of verisimilitude in *Damascus Gate* is not due to the two men's failure to be intellectually coherent. (Since one of them is spaced out and the other is mentally ill, why should they be?) It is due, rather, to the unfortunate fact that the ideas attributed to them are essentially inappropriate for Stone's plot.

Turning to political violence as a means of coaxing a reluctant God to manifest Himself in history is a theme that clearly intrigues Stone; and clearly, too, his choice of Israel as a fictional venue was dictated by this. What better place to explore this theme, indeed, than a Jewish state in which religious and nationalist extremists actually did, back in the 1980s, plot to destroy the Mosque of Omar in order to rebuild the Temple on its ancient site? The problem is that the actual thinking of Israel's religious and nationalist extremists has nothing to do with Kabbalah, and that the fantasies of a character like Raziel have no relevance to anything happening in their circles.

True, Abraham Isaac Kook, chief rabbi of Palestine in British Mandate times and a leading theoretician of religious Zionism, was deeply influenced by Kabbalah. True, too, his son, Rabbi Tsvi Naftali Yehudah Kook, was the intellectual master of Gush Emunim, the religious settler movement that sprung up after the Six Day War. Yet the most militant settlers and their supporters are not mystics and never have been mystics. It is not the hand of God that they have been trying to force with their actions, but the hand of the Israeli government, by seeking—alas, not entirely unrealistically—to embroil it in an endless holy war with Islam. Their messianic vision, if such it be, has never been the ontologically theurgic one of Isaac Luria. It is rather the pragmatically political one of the antimystical and rationalist Maimonides, who (though his writings otherwise provide no support for their policies) wrote:

> Do not think that the king Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, revive the dead, or do similar things. If there arise a king from the House of David who ... rebuilds the sanctuary on its site, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is beyond all doubt the Messiah.

I hope this will not be taken for critical quibbling. By handling Jewish religious nationalism in the wrong framework, Stone ends up writing about the wrong country. In general, not even his admirable powers of observation can hide the fact that his grasp of Israeli reality is far less sure than his grasp of Central America, with its left-wing Catholic priests and lay workers, that he wrote about so marvelously in *A Flag for Sunrise*. There are simply too many mistakes and inaccuracies: the lapses of a writer who has spent time gathering material in a foreign land, taken extensive and hurried notes, and not always been able to read what he has written upon returning home.

Thus, German Jews in Israel are called *yekkes*, not *tekkes*; the Jewish marketplace in Jerusalem is Machaneh Yehuda, not "Machaneh"; a non-Hasidic European Jew is a *mitnaged*, not a *mitnag*; the initial consonant in the Hebrew word *kavana* (concentration in prayer or meditation) is not "glottalized" (some initial "k"'s are in Palestinian Arabic, with which Stone's notes apparently got confused at this point); the numerical value of the Hebrew letter *kuf* is 100, not 19; and so on. Errors of this sort (their uncorrected appearance in print reflects sadly on the decline of copy-editing as a conscientious profession in today's publishing world) are natural. They would be more pardonable if Stone did not deliberately flaunt such details to create the illusion that he knows more about his subject than he does.

For some time now, at least since John Le Carré's *The Little Drummer Girl*, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has served authors of thrillers as a *topos* to write about from the vantage point of world-weary observers like Christopher Lucas, who, themselves lacking all belief in any transcendent purpose in life, are simultaneously drawn and repelled by the consuming faith that motivates religious and political zealots. This genre has come to have rules of its own—among them, that the zealots must be intelligent

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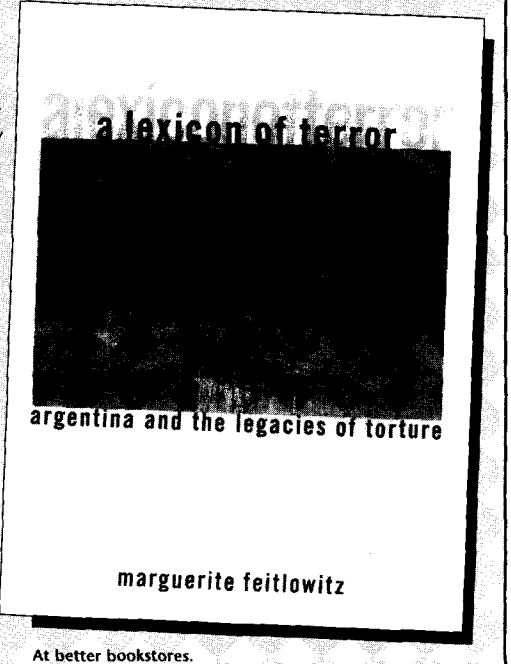
The New York Review of Books



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and initially engaging; that their actions must lead to actual or narrowly averted catastrophe; that they must be, on the Arab and Jewish side, mirror images of each other. While Stone skimps a bit on the last of these (though he does include the obligatory scene with Palestinian fanatics in the Gaza Strip, it is the Jews who exercise him), on the whole he observes them faithfully. His ending, too, sticks to the convention. Like Fielding and Aziz at the conclusion of *A Passage to India*, Lucas and Sonia must go their separate ways, for the believer and the agnostic cannot lie down together.

Yet while Lucas leaves Israel with painfully fond memories of "a land in exile, a God in His absconding, a love in its loss," there is in his attitude toward it, too, an ultimate condescension that corrodes the pages of *Damascus Gate. Ah, Israel!* these pages seem to say. *So alluring in your dreams and certainties to the Western, rational mind—and so fatal if it lets itself be snared by them.* But the truth is that Israel is overwhelmingly a place in which the Western, rational mind prevails and argues with itself, even in the settlements of the West Bank. The Jerusalem Syndrome is not an Israeli illness, nor is the country seen from the Damascus Gate the real one. For an outsider to assume otherwise is to be paternalistic toward its inhabitants and indulgent toward himself, and to make things conveniently easy in either case. Art that makes things easier than they should be is never art of the highest quality.

HILLEL HALKIN is a writer and translator living in Israel, and a contributing editor of the *Forward*.

The Explanation

BY JAGDISH BHAGWATI

The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor by David S. Landes

(Norton, 650 pp., $30)

World Economic Primacy: 1500-1990 by Charles P. Kindleberger

(Oxford University Press, 269 pp., $35)

Big questions demand big minds. To inquire into the wealth and the poverty of nations, to seek to comprehend "why some are so rich and some so poor," is no mean ambition, whether you are an economist or a historian. Indeed, while no economist is likely to attract critical attention investigating how soap is priced or whether the dollar is high, and no historian imperils his reputation by tracking the growth of the coal trade in nineteenth-century Ruhr, the risks are colossal when your canvas is outsized. And so are the rewards.

For this reason, the best among the economists and the historians have not shied away from the challenge of divining the alchemy of wealth and the secret of poverty. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* is the most celebrated example: the work virtually led Smith to found economics as we now know it, though it cannot be held to have ended the quest it defined as its task. Even a cursory glance at the two centuries since Smith's seminal work shows that the problem has continued to invite analysis, and to baffle the analysts.

Within economics itself, the notable efforts include that by Arthur Lewis, who broadened the Smithian inquiry about wealth to ask in 1977, in his *The Evolution of the International Economic Order*, "Why did the world come to be divided into industrial countries and agricultural countries," the former rich and the latter poor. And five years later, Mancur Olson published his influential book on *The Rise and Decline of Nations*. Olson had the interesting idea that pressure groups formed around industries that are related to successful development would eventually turn into a malignant iron fist that, unlike Adam Smith's benign invisible hand, would kill growth, and also that wars and catastrophes that shook up this political kaleidoscope were a major source of renewed prosperity.

Historians, too, have been exercised by this great and urgent problem, often treating it within the context of the rise and fall of the empires that frequently went with the rise to prosperity and glory of nations; Gibbon on the Roman empire and Toynbee on Western civilization define the furthest reaches of the arena over which historians have wandered in their intellectual quest. And now today's premier economic historians, David Landes and Charles Kindleberger, have published important books addressing the same essential issues related to the economic rise and fall of nations, and drawing on the past as defined for Landes as an entire millennium and for Kindleberger as only (only!) its second half.

The timing could not be better. These books straddle between themselves the Asian financial collapse, which has shattered the canonical illusion that the twenty-first century would be Pacific, and replaced it with the inviting belief that it will continue to be American. The turbulent experience of the Asian economies in recent months has brutally exposed the fragility of our ideas and convictions about what triggers and sustains growth and what prompts and accelerates decline. We have learned again that reversals of fortune can be swift; and this is a reminder, too, that these economic historians tread on treacherous ground.

Landes is a historian who has crossed over into economics and Kindleberger is an economist who has crossed over into history. Landes puzzlingly sacrifices countless pages to interesting but peripheral issues; but there is certainly a clear thesis in his immensely learned book, and it is advanced with passion and certitude. It is that culture is the key. The Europeans triumphed economically owing to their culture; and they will continue to do so, as will others who imitate them effectively.

> If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference.... Until very recently, over the thousand and more years ... that people look upon as progress, the key factor—the driving force—has been Western civilization and its dissemination: the knowledge, the techniques, the political and social ideologies, for better or worse. This dissemination flows partly from Western dominion, for knowledge and know-how equal power; partly from Western teaching; and partly from emulation.

For Landes, Western culture, with its associated "values," is the magic bullet, and, once you have it, you will be on a roll except for random contingencies.

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Kindleberger, by contrast, is a "rise-and-fall" man. He is taken more with the notion that nations come and go, even within the charmed orbit of Europe and the Western-values-defined diaspora. Drawing on the economic historian Joel Mokyr's contention that "no country has been on the cutting edge of technical innovation for more than two or three generations," Kindleberger is fascinated by the idea of a "national life cycle." He prefers a Buddenbrooks plot for the inevitable decline in a nation's fortune.

Where Landes displays an occasionally overbearing confidence in his judgments ("Big mistake." "Sacrilege." "Crazy." "Bad history."), Kindleberger's tone is more cautious. He concludes his inquiry with these words: "In due course a country will emerge ... for a time as the primary world economic power. The United States again? Japan? Germany? The European Community as a whole? Perhaps a dark horse like Australia or Brazil or China? Who knows? Not I." The two economic historians thus complement each other in temperament and in technique, Landes aiming at the sweeping, magisterial view that may be provided by the writing of history at its imaginative best, and Kindleberger deploying the focused, microscopic analysis that economics typically brings to the table.

Kindleberger offers a sensible and impeccable taxonomy of "influences," neatly classified into "internal" and "external," that bear on the likely prospect of economic decline in all prosperous nations; but it is Landes's far grander ambition to zero in on the essential mainsprings of wealth formation. He announces boldly that his "aim in writing this book is to do world history ... to trace and understand the main stream of economic advance and modernization." In his display of historical scholarship, Landes reminds me of Sakalanarayan Shastri, the legendary Indian scholar of Sanskrit grammar in the early twentieth century, who was asked "What have you read?" and reportedly replied: "Everything that has been written." Landes's erudition certainly pays off, but not completely. In the end his extraordinary enterprise is only partially successful.

Landes's central argument is that Europe's rise to economic preeminence since the fifteenth century was founded on a constellation of institutions, such as property rights. It also profited from phenomena such as the ability of Europeans to escape cities and nations that did not offer such opportunities to other cities and states, in geographical proximity within Europe, that did offer them. This ability to vote with one's feet meant that, within Europe taken as a whole, the dominant pro-growth institutions held sway despite occasional lapses by particular locales.

What Eric Jones has called "the European miracle," and what Landes calls "European exceptionalism," began, in Landes's account, with the "luck" of geography. The Gulf Stream's warm current (whose origin Landes describes at tedious length) had given Europe a "privileged" temperate climate, consisting of "warm winds and gentle rain, water in all seasons, and low rates of evaporation—the makings of good crops, big livestock, and dense hardwood forests."

But then, why had Egypt and Sumer managed to get ahead even thousands of years earlier? Landes argues that the hardwood forests in Europe could not be cleared for cultivation because Europeans did not have iron cutting tools until the first millennium before our era. The Europeans thus had to settle in the less fertile areas such as lakeshores and grasslands. But this does not quite answer the objection. Why didn't the Europeans develop the iron cutting technology earlier? Why could they not make more of these less fertile settlements?

After all, we know of numerous instances in which human ingenuity, resulting in great civilizations or rapid growth or both, has surmounted worse conditions than those of lakeshore and grassland settlements. Think of Israel blossoming in the desert; or contrast North Korea with South Korea, separated by war and political ideology but not by geography (whether climate, weather, or natural resources). Julian Simon has convincingly argued, against geographical determinism, that human beings are the ultimate resource. Place may impose advantages or disadvantages, but it plays no more than a bit part in the drama of development.

Indeed, Landes himself provides the best antidote to the thesis that geography is destiny by proceeding to argue that what accomplished the European miracle was in fact something else altogether. After the terrifying invasions of the Vikings, the Saracens, and the Magyars had been brought under control, "a new society was born" in Europe in the tenth century. It was based on the principles of "popular sovereignty" as opposed to those of oriental despotism, and on "private property" as contrasted with the

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unprincipled principle of autocracy with its "ruler-owns-all."

Landes draws a larger lesson from this. Only societies with "room for multiple initiatives, from below more than from above, could think in terms of a growing pie." It was this combination of popular sovereignty with the institution of private property that made economic growth possible, and made it probable. Europe also profited from the rise of the semi-autonomous city, the "commune." Functioning economically as "governments of the merchants, by the merchants, and for the merchants," and exercising civil power, these communes provided the merchant, the "lever of riches" in Mokyr's evocative phrase, with the rights and the freedoms to live, to work, to accumulate, to prosper and to produce prosperity. Landes aptly adduces the medieval dictum: *Stadtluft macht frei*, or the city air makes one free.

Along with these fundamental economic and political freedoms came the ability to move to places where they were available, and the willingness of these jurisdictions to attract those who sought these freedoms. This accelerated the spread of these freedoms. The economic expansion that followed led, in turn, to the "commercial revolution" with all its associated codes, contracts, and the commercial infrastructure to support and to sustain trade and manufactures. Landes concludes eloquently that Europe "got thereby substantially enhanced security, a sharp reduction in the cost of doing business (what the economist calls 'transaction costs'), a widening of the market that promoted specialization and division of labor. It was the world of Adam Smith, already taking shape five hundred years before his time."

Landes cannot be faulted when he infers from this story (and from his account of Europe's boundless energy in the era of its outward expansion, in which it discovered the Americas and brought much of the world under its domain) that history is on the side of those who assert that institutions such as property rights, and the presence of flexibility of options when faced by restrictions on the freedom to work and to innovate, are important in improving the prospects for growth. To choose only one recent confirmation of the truth of this perception, anyone familiar with the economic collapse of the Soviet Union, which can be dramatically illustrated by a chart of Soviet growth rates in free fall, and which led Gorbachev into a half-baked *perestroika* with the unintended consequence of disintegration rather than rejuvenation, knows that the steady decline was caused precisely by the absence of the economic freedoms and institutions that Landes deduces from history as conditions conducive to growth.

Indeed, economists have long understood that these conditions are important. Surjit Bhalla argued trenchantly several years ago that "economic freedom," which includes property rights and the freedom to produce and to innovate, was associated with growth rates in a broad cross-section of countries; and the association has been reaffirmed by number-crunching economists such as Robert Barro. Mediocre economists spend endless amounts of time and energy looking at such statistical associations across countries, putting all kinds of countries mindlessly on a "regression" that plots all kinds of variables against growth rates, but they do serve the useful purpose of underlining the conjectures of superior economists and gifted historians, such as Landes and Kindleberger, whose ability to put their inferences into the necessary context, and hence to reach sophisticated judgments, is unrivaled.

If Landes had stopped there, it would have been splendid. He would have reinforced, with the weight of sharp and detailed historical analysis, our current consensus in favor of political and economic freedoms, of democracy and markets, as powerful institutions for promoting prosperity. But he seeks to relate these pro-growth institutions to culture and values, seeking in turn to conclude that nations that do not share this same culture and these same values are doomed to stagnation or to decline from earlier prosperity (which anyway must have been due to fortuitous circumstance).

Landes wishes to link the European miracle causally, in the spirit of Max Weber, to underlying values as defined by the Judeo-Christian, and especially the Protestant, universe. Islam is held to be inimical to a repetition of the European experience owing to its allegedly holistic nature, with religion "in principle supreme and the ideal government that of the holy men." Such assertions recur throughout the book. And here Landes is stepping into quicksand. For it is nearly impossible to relate culture or values to these pro-growth institutions and policy frameworks, and hence to economic growth, in a causally tight way.

Landes rails against economists for being rejectionists on this front. Among numerous assertions of the significance of culture, the most amusing is his insistence that, despite the mirthful scorn of his economist friends, the use of chopsticks has led to East Asian dexterity with doing microassembly in electronics. I must admit that I fit right into Landes's casual empiricism: I can neither handle chopsticks nor fit semiconductor boards. But surely electronics is one modern industry that has spread *across* continents and cultures.

Economists have struggled with the culturalist claim and have given up on it, for several good reasons. For a start, growth seems to be compatible with all kinds of values and cultures. Confucianism was long held to be inimical to growth, but it became the mainspring of growth when the Far Eastern nations—South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong—became the winners in the race in the postwar period. And you have only to read the early literature on Japan to see how many foreign observers thought that Japan's culture was incompatible with growth. My favorite example is this comment by an Australian expert invited by the Japanese government in 1915:

> My impression as to your cheap labour was soon disillusioned when I saw your people at work. No doubt they are lowly paid, but the return is equally so; to see your men at work made me feel that you are a very satisfied easy-going race who reckon time is no object. When I spoke to some managers they informed me that it was impossible to change the habits of national heritage.

I have little doubt that many in Japan also shared this view, condemning Japan to low growth. (When the great Japanese novelist Natsume Soseki was contemplating a career as an architect, he was dissuaded from it at virtually this time by a friend who told him that, Japan being a poor country, he would have no opportunity to build anything splendid like St. Paul's Cathedral.)

Indeed, the early postwar period of developmental economics pitted the culturalists against economists who claimed that the role of culture was vastly exaggerated. A celebrated study by Edwin Dean in Nyasaland investigated the hypothesis that Africans react to prices differently from Western nations where "impersonal" cultural traits have squeezed such factors as tribal affiliation out of prices charged and received. Dean actually sat in on three markets, gathering data on prices to see whether, for instance, sellers belonging to the Likouba and the Bacongo tribes charged lower prices to buyers from their own tribes than to the others. The answer was that there was no statistically significant difference.

In light of such analyses, economists have generally taken three positions on

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the relationship between culture and development. As Walpole said, "every man has his price," and culture simply determines what that price is, not whether there is a price. Moreover, culture yields over time, and in necessary ways, to the profit motive: the sacred cow is sold by Hindus to Muslims for slaughter when the price is good. Then again, given a particular culture, we can still design incentives and policy frameworks (of the sort that Landes rightly extols) that will induce development; culture does not really confound or cripple an activist developmental policy.

In the end, Landes is the prisoner of the ambition that economists have generally renounced. Economists are usually content to explain growth by reference to proximate causes. Thus, the famous Harrod-Domar growth model that inaugurated postwar growth theory simply argued that growth was a function of your savings rate, which determined how much you increased your capital stock, and of the productivity of that increment in capital stock. So, if your income was $100 and your savings rate was 10%, so that you saved and hence invested $10, and the productivity of that investment was such that you would need 5 units of capital to get one unit of output, then income would grow by (10/5) = $2, i.e. by 2%. And if these two parameters (the savings rate and the capital-output ratio) remained unchanged, then growth would continue forever at 2%.

Looking at this, a historian has famously remarked that it was like telling someone who had asked for a road map to just take the first left, then the first right, and keep repeating that until the end of time. Similarly, when W. W. Rostow wrote a book that sought to explain growth by discussing "propensities" to invest and to save and so on, the great economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron observed sardonically that Professor Rostow had explained growth by reference to the propensity to grow.

The wisecracks are funny, but they are off the mark. Economists will probe these parameters further. They will analyze, for example, how an inward-looking policy dampens the inducement to invest, and hence inhibits growth. They have even turned to investigating massively and systematically how the choice of economic policies is determined in the context of politics, breaking down the traditional wall between economists telling governments what they should do and political scientists analyzing what governments will do instead.

But they rarely wish to go further, peeling the onion down to the core, to discover why, "deep down," people exhibit different responses and make different choices when faced by identical institutions and incentives. They are not emboldened in the manner of historians. Consider India's Kafkaesque maze of bureaucratic controls, amounting to what we call here "industrial policy" but in a particularly virulent form. It almost killed India's economic growth for over a quarter of a century before India started economic reforms in 1991. Economists have shown how and why this regime hurt India's economic performance. They have also analyzed the role of economic ideology—the Fabianism which English-trained economists such as myself brought back to India in the late 1950s—and of the political structure and incentives that facilitated the rise and growth to robustness of this affliction.

But did Indian culture matter? I doubt it. After all, with the same overlay of culture in its broadest sense, different

Sky

The sky is where we should have started.
A window without a windowsill, without a frame, without a pane.
An opening wide open, with nothing
beyond it.

I don't have to wait for a starry night,
nor crane my neck,
to look at the sky.
I have the sky behind me, and close at hand and on my eyelids.
It is the sky that wraps me tight
and raises me from underneath.

The highest mountains
are no closer than the deepest
valleys to the sky.
No place has any more of it
than any other place.
A cloud is as thoroughly
crushed by the sky as a grave.
A mole is as high, sky high
as an owl beating its wings.
Whatever falls into an abyss,
falls from sky to sky.

Friable, fluid, rocky,
flammable, volatile stretches
of sky, crumbs of sky,
gusts of sky, heaps of sky.
Sky is omnipresent,
even in darkness under the skin.

I eat the sky, I excrete the sky.
I'm a trap in a trap,
an inhabited inhabitant,
an embrace embraced,
a question that answers a question.

Dividing earth and sky
is not the right way
to think about this wholeness.
It only allows one to live
at a more precise address—
were I to be searched for
I'd be found much faster.
My distinguishing marks
are rapture and despair.

WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA
—translated, from the Polish, by Joanna Trzeciak

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Indian states have experienced astonishingly diverse growth rates. Kerala's success, and Bihar's failure, have been attributed by analysts to factors such as the differences in the politics of an active, bottom-up mobilization of people by successive communist governments in the former, and a passive, top-down politics of feudalism in the latter. Did the fact that Kerala has more Christianity whereas Bihar has more Hinduism matter? If so, how? It is tempting to argue that Christianity has led to the greater emphasis on education. But it is well known that the Brahmins have traditionally valued education to an excess, and many Brahmins led the Indian Renaissance under British rule. Indeed, some have suggested, sometimes playfully and at other times out of exasperation, that it must have been gene mutation under centuries of the caste system, assigning each Indian to his immutable place in the social hierarchy, that led to the close embrace of an economic philosophy that assigns each industry to a hierarchy where goods are not just goods but some are better than others. If I wrote like Landes, I would say: Cute. Or, better still: Crazy.

I do not mean to deny culture any role. But the precise role of culture in economic behavior remains elusive. The encouraging truth appears to be that growth-inducing institutions, like hardy perennials that will grow in different and indifferent soils, are resilient and compatible with a range of cultures. And for a historian who is confronted with economic success in extremely diverse cultures, it is ahistorical to assert otherwise. Ironic.

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An Unsentimental Journey

BY ROBERT BOYERS

The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis translated by Gregory Rabassa

(Library of Latin America, Oxford University Press, 219 pp., $25)

Dom Casmurro by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis translated by John Gledson

(Library of Latin America, Oxford University Press, 258 pp., $25)

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis is fated to be, or to seem to be, a modern writer. He was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1839, and he did his best work in the years between 1880 and 1900, but he is often associated with narrative devices and manners that belong to the standard vocabulary of modernism. Digressive, fragmentary, allusive, reflexive, Machado's mature fictions compulsively refer to their own devices, and make much of their resistance to the features of realist fiction. Writing in a voice that is alternately playful and disenchanted, mocking and didactic, Machado is friendly *and* forbidding. In his volatility, and in his lacerating self-awareness, he is unmistakably our familiar.

The scholarly and critical literature on Machado is extensive. Often he is compared to the writers whom he himself invokes, especially to Sterne. But he has also called to many minds the flamboyances of Gogol, the feral disenchantments of Dostoyevsky's underground man, the comic inventions of Waugh. He has seemed utterly distinctive, inimitable, and yet very much a member of that diverse fraternity of originals who most inspire us by their resistance to optimism, and by their contempt for the varieties of rightmindedness. For mainstream scholars of Latin American literature, Machado is a brilliant allegorist, a philosophical "pessimist," and an important if not always reliable guide to the social conventions of Brazil in the nineteenth century.

Though most of Machado's fiction has been available in English for some time, the Library of Latin America has published new translations of Machado's best-known novels. This makes a kind of sense, even if the earlier English versions of the novels read well and are still in print. Machado is exactly the kind of writer one wishes to see early in such a series. A man of a particular time and a particular place, whose works (they were written in Portuguese) refract the assumption of his society, Machado's frame of reference is nonetheless very broad. He is as comfortable with Othello and Pascal, with Dante and Faust, as with the affairs of the Brazilian church and state, and reminds us that many of Latin America's greatest writers belong to a highly cosmopolitan tradition, and have made wonderful use of ideas and resources drawn from many cultures.

Machado's mature fiction has no subject in the usual sense. Though it records experiences and thoughts ostensibly generated by events in the world, it handles events as it handles everything else, as instigations to reflection or emotion. This is not to say that events in Machado are without their peculiar interest. Often they reveal much that we wish to know about characters, or help us to grasp the logic of the intelligence for which they are emblematic or otherwise remarkable. Still, we do not have the sense in reading these two novels that they are about events or their implications. When critics of Machado's work inform us that it is about the hypocrisy of genteel society in Brazil, or about changes in the tenor of family life, we know that they are confusing one kind of topical interest with another. In these novels, Machado is no more interested in making arguments about social questions than he is interested in making statements about life or the meaning of love.

Of course Machado's narrators make many statements, and more than a few of them have the ring of philosophical generalization. They are eloquent on everything from the difference between men and women to the moment when consciousness is first revealed to itself. They have enough to say on the subject of "discourse" to satisfy, if only briefly, the most mandarin of contemporary theorists. In all of Machado's reflections, however, there is an unmistakable element of deliberate self-cancellation. Often the assertions are too emphatic or too sweeping to be believed. They are an expression of a speaker's will to impress, to sound a note of transparently crummy wisdom. Sometimes the assertions are extended just a bit too long, and we note

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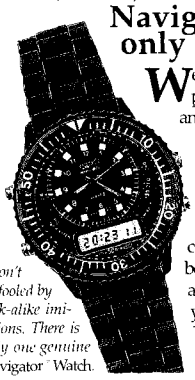

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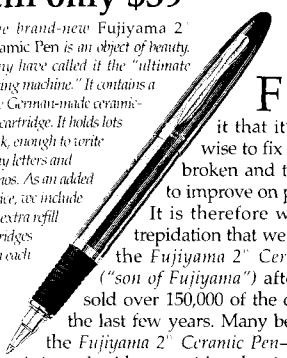

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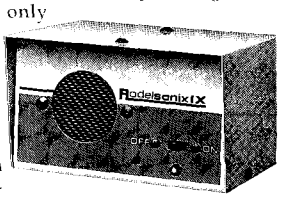

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a certain lugubriousness in the language or a slight exaggeration in the accompanying metaphor, so that our investment in the informing idea is subverted. Many statements are prefaced with expressions such as "Believe me" or "God save you, dear reader, from..." with the result that we pay more attention to voice and idiom and perspective than to the content of an observation or a maxim.

Does it matter that Machado's narrators mean, or half mean, what they say? Of course it matters—not because we expect to find in their statements the truth about this or that, but because the pattern of their thinking shapes our experience of their world and our sense of their imagination. To read Machado is to feel oneself in the presence of an intelligence for which particular sentiments and ways of formulating them are essential. The will to be unillusioned about everything, to see things as they truly are, is persistent in these works, so that they are marked by suspicion, and a preternatural alertness to what lurks behind every appearance. Yet this posture of suspicion is highly selective. Machado's narrators strip away the veil of appearance from some things, but they cannot bring themselves to turn on other things. A mother, whatever the suffering she has caused, whatever her ruinous obduracy, may remain a saint. Some people, ordinary people, are permitted to seem simply virtuous, no matter the temptations to which they apparently succumb. The instinct to expose, to mock, is balanced by an odd, occasional reluctance, by a tenderness that comes across as a sweetness of spirit rather than a failure of mind.

The most aggressively disillusioned of Machado's narrators is Brás Cubas, the deceased narrator of *The Posthumous Memoirs*. Brás writes, as he tells us, with a certain detachment, a freedom from the fear of offending that is rare among the living. "There's nothing as incommensurable," he gaily informs us, "as the disdain of the deceased." No longer obliged to respect this or to fake that, Brás can afford—so he assures us—to be frank, even to expose his own "mediocrity." Indeed, the process of self-exposure is considerably more relentless here than the instinct to anatomize the weaknesses of others. Confronted by a strikingly attractive young woman who disappoints him by being lame, he cannot find a way to make her any less attractive to us. "Nature is sometimes a great mocker," he reflects. "Why pretty if lame? Why lame if pretty?" An enigma, he calls it, and though we repudiate the logic of the questions posed by our misanthropic Brás, we savor the metaphysical delight that he takes in contradiction.

Some pages later, he goes so far as to wonder whether the young woman's "existence"—conceived strictly in terms of the contradiction between "pretty" and "lame"—"was quite necessary for the century." A terrible, hideous question, like others that Brás formulates. In spite of these reflections, however, the young woman remains a figure of unimpeachable dignity, subject to no exposure that would make her attractiveness seem illusory. For all of Brás's instinct for subversion, he is so compulsively self-absorbed that his questions serve largely to discredit his own motives and humanity.

Machado's novel is ostensibly the autobiography of a fellow whose life has been most ordinary and therefore quite awful. A wealthy bachelor, Brás has little to tell us about the lives of most Brazilians in his time. Here and there, he will reflect for a moment on the fall of Bonaparte or on the Brazilian slave economy. But he is not much interested in such matters, and he has only a vague inclination to a productive life. He never marries, he has no children, and he comes to the end of his life with virtually nothing to celebrate or to cherish. Mostly he devotes himself to the pursuit of women and the sensuous cultivation of boredom. It is clear that he reads, and takes a modest pleasure in thinking about the few things that claim his attention. Occasionally, his needs satisfied, he is moved to proclaim that "life is sweet," but he is more characteristically, as he puts it, "lazy and hazy."

Were his fantasies and reflections any less interesting than they are, the reader would be appalled, and numbed, by the poverty of his pursuits, which have mainly to do with the long affair that he carries on with a married woman named Virgília. The efforts of these two people to sustain affection, to outwit detractors, and to deny the waning of avidity take up much of the novel's narrative surface. There are brief moments of intrigue, when a suspicious husband threatens, or when someone else is close to exposing the lovers. When the lovers' edifice of deception threatens to fall apart, there occurs a culmination as delicious and zany as anything in Restoration comedy. But the primary note amid the comings and goings of this affair is tedium, and what Machado once called "the discourse of love" is here transparently threadbare.

For all of Brás's will to self-exposure, he is never sharply disappointed in himself or moved to undertake anything that might challenge or change him. The fragmentary narrative of his life—it is told in 160 very brief chapters, some no more than a short paragraph—is compelling because it is told by a restlessly inventive and unstable intelligence. We are held by the antics of a mind perpetually in motion, however limited the distance it travels. Nothing the character does is nearly as interesting as the character himself.

There is, in Brás's narrative, little of the anxiety associated with the usual predicaments of life. So aloof is the deceased from the ups and downs that he records, so often does he insist upon detaching us from the action—"And now watch the skill, the art with which I make the greatest transition in this book. Watch."—that we cannot but stand back, amused, only rarely troubled, or puzzled, but never inflamed. Yes, it is interesting to note the way a courtesan named Marcela preys upon her young lover, but we are never fearful for him, or concerned about the fate of her soul. We observe that she is bewitching and unrepentant, but it is the performative aspect of her encounters with Brás that absorbs us. When she is caught in an important lie, and dismisses it with a wave of her hand and a "What difference does it make?" our heart does not ache for the poor young man who is "teary-eyed" and importunate. We know, more or less from the beginning of the novel, that we are not to concern ourselves with the particulars of Brás's failures in love, that they amount to little more than the occasion for bitterly playful retrospection. Characters such as Marcela are vividly drawn, and we are moved with Brás by the light in their eyes or the frankness of their gestures; but they do not have moral solidity. They are occasions of consciousness.

The affair with Virgília, narrated in bits and pieces spread out over many chapters of the novel, brings delirium, obsession, possessiveness, and a variety of other emotions. It involves Brás in various escapades and droll deceptions. The cuckolded husband is appropriately high-minded, scrupulous, credulous, a sitting duck for the condescension and voluptuous indifference that he inspires. The beloved herself is by turns adorable, callow, audacious, and reluctant, which is to say, she inspires precisely the inconstant, lurching variety of emotions that Brás displays throughout the duration of his long enchantment. Now and then he is seized by a trace of remorse, but generally he mistrusts such emotions, and inclines rather to associate remorse with body chemistry. He swells with pride when his indiscretions are exposed or recalled.

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The language of the narrative is as fitful in its alternations as its moods and its ideas. Exclamation gives way rapidly to dryness, lugubrious sensuality to finicky self-correction. Occasionally self-indulgent in his multiplication of adjectives, Brás resolves not to slip "into the emphatic," to remain "simple." Yielding often to the pleasures of rhetoric ("Such delightful pretense! Such infinitely delicate skills! Such profound Tartuffeanism! And all of it natural, alive, unstudied, as natural as appetite, as natural as sleep."), he knows instinctively when and how to reel it in, to check the forward momentum with short declarative sentences, to turn back against the flow of language. ("That's not quite exact," "There's a phrase that's close to being nonsense," "This book and my style are like drunkards, they stagger left and right....") The seductive Virgília, equipped with "the tactics and subtlety of serpents," and more than a match for Brás, is also a figure out of sentimental melodrama, endowed with the cloying language of regret and retreat. ("All is lost. Forget me forever.... Goodbye, forget the unhappy.") In Machado's universe, nothing stays still for very long. The constant shifts in idiom and velocity mirror the narrator's constant shifting about, from self-congratulation to indifference, from pleasure to discontent, from mischief to melancholia.

Susan Sontag has aptly associated the garrulousness of Machado's narrators with "the despair behind the sprightly musings of Robert Walser and the quirkily erudite, bantering voices in the stories of Donald Barthelme." The erudite Brás throws out literary references with the casual off-handedness of a speaker who doesn't care where they land. If his theories routinely succeed one another without taking on substantial weight, that would seem to reflect Brás's despairing sense that nothing can adequately account for (or halt) what happens to him. He goes on and on at least in part to avoid having to tally his losses. To be sure, his book has "the smell of the grave about it." It is designed to look at the worst and not to wish it away. Still, so long as there are ideas to keep in play, and ironies to deploy, there is some semblance of life and force. The "loquacious sprightly musings" to which Sontag refers are not enough to keep off despair, but they sustain the contradictoriness necessary to Machado's imagination.

Late in the novel, when Brás is forced to bid farewell to his lady-love, he knows that he "should have suffered great despair, shed a few tears," but instead he eats a good lunch, "as on every day," and refuses to make his narrative read like a novel of sentiment. Even later, when Virgília's husband has died, and he sees her at the funeral, he reflects that "Virgília had betrayed her husband, sincerely, and now she was weeping for him, sincerely. There you have a difficult combination whose trajectory I was unable to follow completely." Machado's novel treats sincerity the way it treats everything, as one possible mood. What Brás notes in his own response to Virgília's departure from his life is that emotion can be arbitrary, that there is no regularity in human things.

It is not, then, the business of Machado's novel to account—certainly not "completely"—for what it exhibits, to arrive at laws of human feeling. Its business is to demonstrate how a particular imagination nourishes itself. Not surprisingly, there is resistance to such a reading of Machado. It focuses on the episodes in *The Posthumous Memoirs* that involve a character named Quincas Borba. This lunatic philosopher erupts into the novel and seems to plant within it a number of ideas associated with the term "Humanitism." Scholars determined to read Machado's book as a novel of ideas are in no way deterred by Borba's lunacy, or by the perfect certainty with which he insists upon what is often nonsense. Is pain, as Borba claims, an illusion? Are wars an expression of the striving for "sublimity" in human beings, and are epidemics "good" for the survival of the species? A number of scholars identify such opinions as part of the "philosophy" of the novel.

Brás is temporarily taken with these ideas, many of them familiar from the work of other thinkers; and yet the novel shows that Brás is susceptible to many ideas, and that many of them are weak or nonsensical. Surely Brás's growing alarm at Borba's patent insanity instructs us to regard everything associated with "Humanitism" as suspect. Borba recommends that we reduce everything in experience to "ideas," that we treat our feelings, including pain, as routinely susceptible to the correction of will. Though Brás himself is fond of ideas, and readily converts what he observes into maxims and hypotheses, no good reader of Machado's novel may suppose that his intention is to promote the ideas that his unreliable character entertains or espouses.

This is not to suggest that Machado was not more drawn to certain ideas than to others. In *Dom Casmurro*, a much later novel, particular ideas are retrieved for what are sometimes similar purposes. In the main, though, the ideas are impressionistic rather than systematic.

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They are colored by the eccentric perspective of the protagonists, and they have about them none of the rigor of a philosophy or a logic. Is virtue accidental, or a "celestial" relation to timidity, its natural breeding ground? Such notions are thrown off with the capricious fluency that we expect of Machado's protagonists. If pressed, they are as apt to shake their heads and go to bed as to argue or reason.

Dom Casmurro is almost as digressive as *The Posthumous Memoirs*, but it more closely resembles a conventional fiction. In obvious ways it is a love story focused on a relationship between childhood sweethearts who eventually marry, but it is more especially the first-person life story of the young man, who remembers it all as a sly, mischievous, somewhat dyspeptic old man who sounds rather like Brás Cubas. He is as free and easy with opinions and ideas as Brás, and as hard-bitten and unillusioned. Confronted, like Brás, with the death or the disappearance of those closest to him, he reports that he "dined well and went to the theater." Moved to remorse or to tenderness, he peremptorily shuts off the feeling; and when gazing upon the fruits of his very occasional generosity, he reflects that "I'd rather have paid for a dose of leprosy." At once more credulous than Brás and more cunning, he is also more human and sympathetic.

Dom Casmurro narrates his story with the sense that it will disturb many readers, especially "lady readers," who will wish it were more of a "parish letter." Aware of the superficial resemblances between his romance and the staples of sentimental fiction, Machado's narrator assiduously remarks upon the differences, and underlines the satiric elements in his presentation. Frequently he pokes and prods his reader to reflect upon, or to yield to, what is offered. When he exaggerates, he cites his own propensity for exaggeration, and explains it as compensation "for this obsession with accuracy that plagues me." Often he pretends to restrain himself from one or another literary indiscretion, and plays the prude as freely as he plays the wounded lover or the cold misanthrope.

His most characteristic reflex is the ironic deflection of true emotion. He will offend only the reader who doesn't hear the accent or get the joke. Even his earnest tallying up of sins and virtues—"I will never forget that I gave two or three months of happiness to a poor devil, and made him forget his illness and the rest. It's something when my life's accounts have to be settled.... This one will pay for one or two of my sins"—amounts to a mockery of conventional piety, a broad joke that the narrator tells about his own spiritual poverty. For the reader to pause at such passages for thoughtful self-interrogation is to miss the air of breezy mischief that informs or hovers near every earnest sentence in the novel.

Dom Casmurro remembers all the way back to his childhood, and he attempts, as he says, to reconstruct as much as he can. A number of carefully drawn characters are brought sharply to life, none more sharply than his mother, who has promised her son to the church and thereby provokes him, his beloved Capitu, and their allies to plot furiously to save him. Also brilliantly realized is a household dependent named José Dias, whose grasp of convention is at once so complete and so oppressive that he can only clarify and bewilder. With his love of superlatives, his starched white trousers, and a "black satin cravat" that "immobilized his neck," he is said to move with "a logical, calculated slowness, a complete syllogism, the premise before the consequence, the consequence before the conclusion."

Machado's greatest character is surely the mercurial Capitu. A liberated young woman in the intensity of her appetites and the strength of her intentions, she develops from a scheming, sometimes desperate being into a handsome, charming, adult woman. She seems to be hanging onto her youthful lover for his money and his position, but when she realizes her ambitions and marries our hero, we are almost as sold on her virtues and her attractions as he is; and it is only with great reluctance that we allow him, in the end, to undermine our certainty and to make us wonder, with him, whether she has all along been the sort of person to betray her husband and use her cunning for purposes of which we cannot approve. Dom Casmurro's suspicion of his wife, and the resolve to which it leads him, are the darkest elements of the novel, and only the inveterate cynicism of the man himself prevents them from dominating the narrative.

Dom Casmurro is surrounded not only by characters but also by the various social institutions that they represent. There are various embodiments of the church, none so powerful as the charismatic mother with the will of iron and the pious fanaticism to match. Time and again Casmurro is reminded of his privileged position and its attendant responsibilities. A fellow in his "position" must surely be able to see that his girlfriend has "gypsy" eyes, "eyes the devil gave her ... oblique and sly," and that it is his duty to resist them. So must he learn to keep himself apart from a friend who might well "pass for a servant" or "has a real penchant for vulgar people." From this world of pious superstitions, Casmurro breaks free at least in part as a consequence of his sexual avidity. Infatuated with his young neighbor, who refuses to be deterred by inequalities of rank or wealth, he learns early to deceive and to dissemble. His lying, he finds, is "at times as involuntary as perspiration." And the institutions that oppress him rely on formulas that can be subverted: words themselves, he discovers, betray, and confound, and serve ends that are never certain. "Don't call me a dissembler," he admonishes the reader. "Call me compassionate."

The most affecting thing about Dom Casmurro is his obsession with Capitu and her "devil's" eyes, and his lifelong struggle with sexual jealousy. His obsession is conveyed in many passages; and however much the man laughs at himself, or surrounds the relevant passages with fanciful literary allusions or extravagant wordplay, the magnitude of his insecurity is unmistakable. Married, briefly happy, he is soon tormented by their inability to produce a child. Later a father, he is "embarrassed and annoyed" at the pleasure that others enjoy at the sight of Capitu's bare arms, at the way other men "brushed their black sleeves against them." Even at his most adroit, when he draws an extended analogy with *Othello*, and proposes, "as an experiment, that all plays should begin with their endings," so that the horror and the killing should be gotten out of the way at the beginning, and everyone can "go to bed with a happy impression of tenderness and love," we still feel his nagging suspicion, his bleak demand for a certainty that his life will not afford him.

If *Dom Casmurro* is a love story dominated by jealousy, it never offers a reliable explanation for the protagonist's disfiguring obsession. But then *Dom Casmurro* is not in any singleminded way about sexual jealousy, any more than it is, as one critic has it, "an ironic critique of Catholicism," or a work "about the failure of memory." The novel is, rather, another one of Machado's incommensurable displays of incommensurability, another one of his playful and profound explorations of the gap between what is sought and what is possible, between reality and representation, past and present. Adopting by turns the trappings of a romance, an autobiography, a case study, and a learned treatise, Machado's novel displays the available tools for

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an ostensibly authoritative, "truthful" accounting, and reveals on every page the hopelessness of it all. Casmurro's failure to be sure about his wife's presumed infidelity, his failure to convey to us any assurance of what happened, is symptomatic of the larger failure of the novel to dispense with the conventions and the devices that it relentlessly pillories and parodies.

What makes *Dom Casmurro* one of the wittiest of novels is the confidence of the narrator that he can do with the conventions and the stereotypes and the platitudes what he will. Alert to his own occasional decline into "the overblown," he knows how to make light of it. Given to belaboring the obvious or resorting to "an old truism," he acknowledges everything with the certainty that he is rising above it. Wounded, reeling, he calls upon his "dearly beloved reader," as if the summoned intimacy might produce an affinity, and a promise of relief from his own cruel misgivings.

Of course, there is pain amidst the wit and the humor, and it is not always easy to remember what kind of book this is. How do we read such a work? The thoroughly digressive chapters are not nearly so numerous here as in *The Posthumous Memoirs*, and so we are tempted to lose ourselves in the narrative, to suppose that there is irony in the book only where it is explicit. But the novel is riddled with interjections and discontinuities that forbid us to read naïvely. Such instructions are as familiar in the writings of Sterne as in the work of many modernist writers. "Excuse these metaphors," Casmurro will suddenly interject. Often he announces where he is about to go ("I'm changing course") or summarizes where he has been. Chapters are said to be out of their proper order. Life is compared, at considerable length, to an opera, with God as the librettist and Satan as the composer. Here and there, as in the operatic digression, the tropes and the tics seem a little sophomoric. But these rodomontades soon come to seem an essential part of the narrative voice. They confer upon the work as a whole the quality of ironic self-reflection that converts a bittersweet psychological fiction into an ambiguous parody of such a work.

Of course, a novel cannot be admired simply on the grounds that it resists one stance and opts instead for another. Readers infatuated with modernist devices often misread realist fiction, as if it were by definition more conventional than so-called experimental work, as if readers of realist fiction were more credulous than other readers. Thus the critical afterword appended to the new edition of *Dom Casmurro* refers to the "unambiguous causality" of realist fiction, as if Machado had miraculously complicated something that is ever so elementary in such simple fellows as Stendhal or Tolstoy.

Yet such false dichotomies are not required for an appreciation of Machado's achievement. Building what appears to be a more or less continuous linear narrative, but embedding it in a retrospective frame that allows for digression and discontinuity, Machado tempts us to regard the linear narrative as the core of the novel and to regard everything else as embellishment, as clever protomodernist excess; but in truth he is a serious modernist. He insists that his subversion of forms in art need not be merely willful. Nothing is what it seems in *Dom Casmurro*, yet the eccentric and wayward Casmurro cannot elude the questions that have all along tormented him. Machado never permits him to become the perfectly alienated witness. Brás Cubas is, by comparison, more detached from his life story, but he, too, is without hope.

And the reader? He is anything but detached. Quite the contrary. He is captured and tickled and enthralled by Machado's every move; and so he can only hope that the Library of Latin America will correct and improve its subsequent editions, because these volumes are marred by a variety of errors and occasional infelicities.

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TRB *continued from page 6*

ment so substantial that it outweighs other considerations. In such cases, journalists become public heroes: Watergate gave us Woodward and Bernstein and *All the President's Men*. But when the people, for whatever reason, feel that the stakes don't warrant a hunt for full disclosure, they respond to the media with indifference or scorn. Bimbroglio is hardly the first example of this perceptual disjunction. Iran-Contra never really managed to outrage the public the way it outraged the Washington press corps. During the Gulf war, reporters were ridiculed for cross-examining security-conscious military spokesmen in Saudi Arabia.

There's nothing inherently wrong with this gap between the public and the press. In fact, the press must be prepared to depart from, or even offend, public sensibilities if it is to perform its democratic mission of holding government to account. Still, it should be sobering for reporters to realize that the media's priorities and the public's priorities diverge even more than they used to only a few years ago. According to a recent survey commissioned by the Pew Research Center, for example, 32 percent of Americans believe that criticism by the press keeps political leaders from doing their jobs well. That is double the figure recorded in 1985.

This is immensely frustrating for reporters, but there's little they can do about it. Journalists persuade themselves that the public can be roused from its apathy if only the press can succeed in serving up just a bit more of the truth. The press corps' relentlessness is, in this sense, a function of its democratic idealism, not its cynicism. But more disclosure can't cure disclosure fatigue.

The dramatic high point of the April 30 press conference came when James Bennet of *The New York Times* asked Clinton to comment on polls showing that most Americans approve of his performance as president but no longer respect him as a person. Clinton responded with some passive-aggressive muttering about his well-organized enemies. But he could easily have turned the tables on Bennet. Americans strongly support freedom of the press. But, according to the Pew survey, large majorities also say the press is "often inaccurate," that its coverage of politics and public policy is biased, and that it devotes "excessive" attention to the personal and ethical behavior of public officials. What does that prove?

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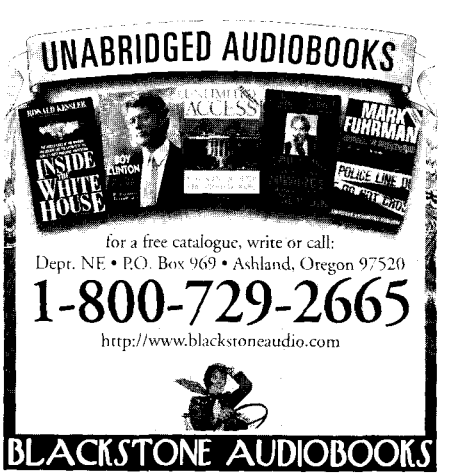

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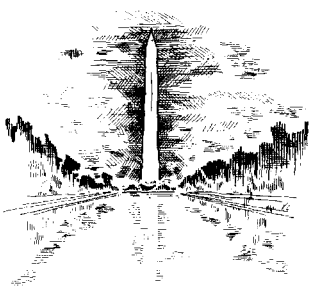
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Yidfellas

TOUGH JEWS, THE BOOK IS called. Is there any other kind? The empires are gone but we are here, ordering our eggs without the yolk and otherwise developing our civilization. (We are never without the yoke.) The cover of Rich Cohen's book displays a fist with brass knuckles, on which the image of a father and a son is gently projected: the sweetness of violence. An odd ideal for Jews; but this is a book produced by the pampered son of the most pampered Jewry in history who nonetheless insists that for a Jew the choice is to kill or be killed. Cohen prefers Jews who kill. He was born too late, alas, to distinguish himself in the Warsaw Ghetto. He must suffice with his affection for the Jewish heroes who killed in Brooklyn, with Lepke Buchalter and Abe Reles and Pep Strauss and Tick-Tock Tannenbaum and Bugsy Goldstein and the other Jewish gangsters of Brooklyn in the 1930s and 1940s. Cohen has a sentimental connection to these Jews who never said die (except to others). His grandparents owned a diner on Livonia Avenue, and it served as a headquarters—sorry, "a shrine to their bravado"—for the delightful young men who made up Murder Inc. (Ah, Livonia! It was there, in Fortunoff's, that my parents bought their very young son the von Karajan recording of *Otello*, the one with del Monaco, thereby turning me away from a future of crime.)

"THE GANGSTERS WERE A PROTOtype of a new kind of Jew," Cohen claims. They were "the toughest Jews in America." "Here were men who had no idea Jews are supposed to be weak, so they weren't." "The Jewish gangsters were among the first Jews to scrap the notion of Jewish exceptionalism, to set Jews adrift in a world of killers and thieves, to set them free." "When kids on the block were faced with the image of the German concentration camp, the memory of the gangsters would give them another image: tough Jews, Jews who will not be led to the slaughter. What do you think Pep Strauss would do to a guy like Heinrich Himmler? Drill fifteen holes in him, the Kraut bastard!" "When the extent of the Holocaust became clear, when refugees began turning up with stories and tattoos, Jews who had never really considered the virtue of violence, considered it now." "Remembering Jewish gangsters is a good way to deal with being born after 1945, with being someone who has always had the Holocaust at his back." "The emergence of a strong Israel [was] proof that not everything the gangsters believed was wrong." "These killers [of Salvatore Maranzano] seem about as skillful as the Israeli commandos who slipped into Entebbe." When Abe Reles was ambushed by the Shapiro brothers, "it was a bad night for the Kid—his own personal Night of Broken Glass." When Lepke Buchalter decides to go into hiding, "Lepke would do what Anne Frank and so many other European Jews would do just a few years later."



ALL THIS IS EXtremely aggravating. Cohen's grasp of history is feeble. (There are some small mistakes in his book, too.) I do not refer to the history of the Jews in Europe. I refer to the history of the Jews in Brooklyn. For a start, there is the matter of who these "tough Jews" really were. They were in no sense heroes. They were (here I must repair to the linguistic precision of Bay Parkway, where one finds a technical vocabulary that captures the phenomenon in all its complexity) dumb fucks. They believed in nothing, except money and attitude. They betrayed one another as easily as they murdered one another. They were mentally and emotionally coarse to the point of primitivism. I mean primitivism in the bad sense. But the primitivism of these butchers is the point, isn't it? They were not only Jews who killed. They were also Jews who couldn't spell. And so they represented a release from all those centuries of suffering and spelling. Redemption!

IS IT REALLY NECESSARY TO POINT out that the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto and the rescuers in Entebbe were not impeded in their efforts by their intelligence? Weakness comes in many forms. The perdurability of the Jews has been owed to their absolute refusal ever to stop thinking, to the romance of brains. It is not toughness that the Jewish gangsters represent, it is stupidity. And evil, too; but a hooligan-ist such as Cohen is not much exercised by moral considerations. He admires the *élan vital* of the dumb fucks.

IT IS CHARMING, I GUESS, TO MAKE the acquaintance of Knadles Nitzberg and Little Farfel Cohen. (Though the greatest achievement in the onomastics of Jewish crime is surely Chaim the Mummy. He was born Herman Scheiner and appears in a detective's report on depravity on the Lower East Side in 1912.) And it is charming, I guess, to read a sentence such as this one: "Mendy asked Pretty to meet him for dinner at Yiddel Lorber's." But it is not charming to learn that Mendy and a few other disordered characters tied Pretty up and sliced him to pieces with small knives, and threw the pieces of Pretty into a car and drove it to a desolate spot near the Brooklyn Navy Yard and torched it, and invited their girlfriends to watch. The incident is lacking in irony. But "these were the glory days of Murder Inc.," Cohen observes. "If the gang were a rock band, this would be 1967 to 1970. If they were Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, this would be the eighties. If they were Wings, well, the troop could never be confused with Wings." Wings is for Jews who go like sheep to the slaughter.

BUT RICHIE IS NOT A BAD BOY, really. He may denounce "middle-class, comfortable easy-chair Jews," but he is represented by the Wylie Agency. His model is not Meir Kahane. His model is Larry King. In Bensonhurst, when Larry King was Larry Zeiger, he and Richie's father and a few other guys used to live vicariously through the exploits of the sanguinary creeps a few miles to the east. Now they meet in Nate 'n Al's and act tough over bagels lightly shmeared. Larry King, of course, is the softest Jew in the history of the Jewish people. But never mind. Finally it is not the admiration of violence that animates Cohen's book, but the admiration of the admiration of violence. *Tough Jews* is just an exercise in an ugly, harmless nostalgia. "The Reles legend was handed down from my father to me," Cohen writes, as Jewish sons have always written. Jewish sons have always been nostalgic for the nostalgia of Jewish fathers. And anyway, "what is a gangster if not a pop star?" The grotesque question answers itself; but if it is Jewish brutality that Cohen cherishes, he should quit Livonia for Sunset. There he will find the real posers and the real killers, where nobody answers to reality.

LEON WIESELTIER

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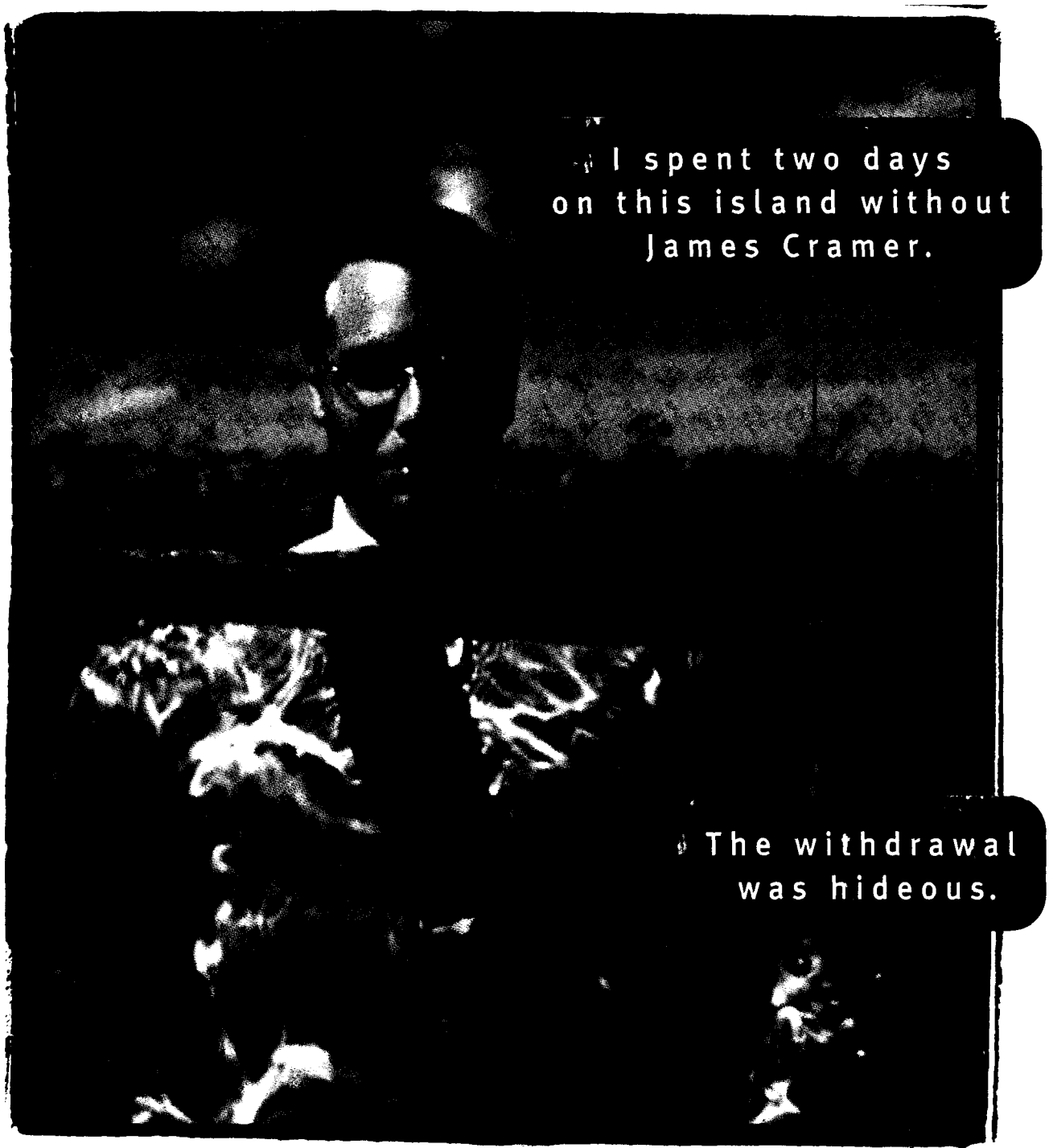

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